

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Healing the Wounds of the Colonised Body: Writing Back in Twenty-first-century  
Works by British Caribbean Women Writers

Léčení ran kolonizovaného těla: Vzorné psaní v dílech britsko-karibských  
spisovatelek 21. století

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí diplomové práce:

PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.

Praha, leden 2014

Zpracovala:

Veronika Vítková

Studijní obor:

Anglistika a amerikanistika



## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 13. ledna 2014

.....

Veronika Vítková

## **Poděkování**

Děkuji PhDr. Soně Novákové, CSc., M.A. za cenné rady, podněty a vstřícnost při konzultacích.

## **Abstrakt v českém jazyce**

Pozice černošských žen ve světě, ve kterém panuje nadvláda bílého subjektu a nadřazenost muže, je často charakterizována pomocí pojmu „dvojí kolonizace“. Imperiální i patriarchální ideologie podrobovaly černošské ženy skrze jejich tělesnost. Černošské spisovatelky, v rámci tzv. proti-diskursu, proto zobrazují zkušenost s otroctvím a kolonizací jako rány na černošském ženském těle. Využívají tak ke svým vlastním účelům zbraně, které byly historicky používány proti nim.

Jejich „vzdorné psaní“ – způsob léčení zraněného těla – tak představuje nejen reakci na dvě zmíněné soustavy „mytologií“, ale i další z nich vycházející typy konstruování jinakosti, např. sexuální, teritoriální či diskursivní. Je tak vytvářen komplexní prostor – vize vyléčení – který je v mnoha aspektech blízky pozitivním a posilujícím teoretickým konceptům Homiho Bhabhy.

I když vytvářejí tuto pokrokovou literární vizi, zároveň černošské autorky udržují kontakt s realitou. V té, jak věřila postkoloniální feministická kritička Gayatri Spivak, neexistuje žádný prostor, ze kterého by podrobený subjekt mohl mluvit. Široká historická a geografická perspektiva, jež je důsledkem jejich mnohovrstvého útlaku, umožňuje černošským autorkám zaujmout jedinečnou pozici jak na kontinuu „teorie – praxe“, tak na kontinuu vymezeném na jedné straně Spivak, na druhé Bhabhou.

Tato obecná témata jsou zkoumána prostřednictvím úzkého zaměření na britsko-karibské spisovatelky 21. století, konkrétně Grace Nichols, Jean Bintu Breeze, Dorotheu Smartt a Andreu Levy. Co se týká metodologie, tato diplomová práce je charakterizována přímou analýzou vybraných prací, která předchází studiu sekundární literatury. Tento přístup, v angličtině často označovaný jako „hands-on approach“, ale není zvolen na úkor teorie; kromě Bhabhy a Spivak budou k analýze využita teoretická díla Sary Suleri, Ch. T. Mohanty, Edwarda Saida, Haydena Whita či Paula Gilroye.

**Klíčová slova:** černošské spisovatelky, vzdorné psaní, gender, rasa

## **Abstract in English**

Black women's position within the world of male superiority and white supremacy came to be characterised by the term "double colonisation". Both patriarchal and imperial social order focused on their corporeality to justify their subjugation. Accordingly, black women writers came to conceptualise their experience of colonisation and slavery as wounds suffered by the black female body. They thereby use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

Their "writing back" – a means of healing the body – constitutes a multi-level response to both sets of mythologies as well as other types of marginalisation and othering, which the two involved, such as sexual, territorial or discursive. It results in the construction of a complex space – a healing vision – which is not dissimilar to Homi Bhabha's empowering theoretical concepts.

However, while providing such progressive literary vision, black women writers also maintain connection with reality, where, as Gayatri Spivak argued, there is no space from where the subaltern sexed subject can speak. Their broad historical and geographical perspective, which is a product of the multi-levelness of their oppression, enables black women writers to take up a unique position on both the continuum of "theory – praxis", as well as that of "silence (Spivak) – voice (Bhabha)".

These larger issues are examined by means of a narrow focus on twenty-first-century works by British Caribbean women writers, more particularly Grace Nichols, Jean Binta Breeze, Dorothea Smartt and Andrea Levy. Methodologically, this thesis is characterised by what came to be called a "hands-on approach" – close study of the individual works, which precedes the use of secondary sources. This approach, however, is not employed at the expense of theory. Apart from Bhabha and Spivak, works by other theoreticians will be discussed, among them Sara Suleri, Ch. T. Mohanty, Edward Said, Hayden White, or Paul Gilroy.

**Key words:** black women writers, writing back, gender, race

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	9
1.1. Summary .....	9
1.2. Selection and rationale .....	12
1.3. Theoretical framework .....	16
1.4. Research questions .....	18
1.5. Limitations .....	19
1.6. Terminology and ethical issues .....	21
1.7. Structure of the thesis.....	22
2. Multiple marginalisation of black women .....	24
2.1. Patriarchal and imperial domination: the body and the land.....	24
2.2. Postcolonial and feminist theory .....	30
2.2.1. Black women within Western feminist discourse .....	31
2.2.2. Black women within postcolonial theory .....	34
2.3. Postcolonial feminism.....	36
2.4. Chapter Summary .....	38
3. Establishing geographical connections: the land and the body .....	40
3.1. Territorialisation of the other body .....	41
3.2. Territorialisation of the female body.....	47
3.3. Territorialisation of gender restrictions.....	52
3.4. Mother-daughter knot, or territorialisation of female bonds .....	54
3.5. Chapter Summary .....	57
4. Drawing temporal linkages: the past and the body .....	59
4.1. Reading history for clues, not for facts: history versus memory.....	60
4.2. “Bodymemory” .....	65
4.3. Ancestral figures .....	68
4.4. Chapter Summary .....	75
5. The Third Space, or when place and time cross.....	77
5.1. The Cariwoma spirit.....	77
5.2. Rootless cosmopolitans.....	81
5.3. The value of the Third Space .....	82
5.4. The world as a place for every/body .....	87
5.5. Where the Third Space collides with reality .....	88
6. Conclusion .....	91
6.1. Suggestions for further research.....	91
6.2. A humanist vision: the space where all wounds heal.....	93





# 1. Introduction

This thesis analyses twenty-first-century works by selected British women writers of Caribbean origin, more particularly Grace Nichols, Jean Binta Breeze, Dorothea Smartt and Andrea Levy. Topics recurring in their writing will be discussed and put in wider context of issues of gender and racial discrimination. Focus will primarily be put on what came to be called “writing back”. Such investigation is bound to shed light on the perspective of a “third world woman” living in “the metropolis”.

The outcomes of the analysis will be assessed against the most dominant theories of agency, most importantly Homi Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, which will also function as a framework for the whole discussion. This positive and empowering notion will be put in contrast to Gayatri Spivak’s belief that “[t]here is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak.”<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will provide a cohesive summary of the issues of interest and also explain the rationale behind the choice of the topic. My research will also be related to the existing academic literature and theories that will function as the foundation to this study will be progressively introduced.

## 1.1. Summary

The business of “knowing”, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* teaches us, had long been the most formidable ally of economic and political control. This knowing – assisted by derogatory images and discourse – underpinned imperial dominance in that it constructed colonised countries as subordinate to Europe and thereby justified the whole colonial process under the guise of the so called *mission civilisatrice*. This mission involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous peoples and their cultures beneath the weight of imperial control represented by European language, literature, learning and thinking.<sup>2</sup> This issue was most famously discussed in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). His concept, however, is equally applicable in different geographical contexts.

---

<sup>1</sup> G. Ch. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C.

<sup>2</sup> Ashcroft, B. et al. eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003) 1.

The Caribbean, too, was subjected to essentialising and reductionist practices, which resulted in violent suppression of all kinds of complexities not convenient to the coloniser. This primarily regarded the islands' indigenous peoples – Caribs and Arawaks, who were decimated by the Spanish – as well as the later imported Africans, whose labour became the mechanics of slavery. European colonisers employed a range of discursive practices that completely swept aside the territory's innumerable histories, variety of peoples, languages, experiences and cultures.<sup>3</sup> In other words, they effected the reduction of the Caribbean from a rich four-dimensional space into a simple flat two-dimensional territory. Since the Caribbean was colonised for a longer period than Asia or Africa, the effect of the Empire on its societies was much deeper and more intense.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1950s, it was the West Indians – the Windrush generation - who started massively changing the texture of British society and challenging the white-defined notion of Englishness by what *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* calls “colonisation in reverse”.<sup>5</sup> However, though the experience of the first generations and their children (or grandchildren for that matter) differed in many aspects, they both faced similar essentialising and reductionist practices, racism and exclusion, which made belonging or sinking roots very difficult, if not impossible. The business of knowing was at play here, too. Though black people had been part of the British Commonwealth for centuries – both in the colonies as well as in the United Kingdom – their history had successfully been erased. This enabled jingoists like Enoch Powel to identify the 1950s as the beginning of the nation's “race problem”.<sup>6</sup> Black Britons thereby remained stuck beneath the weight of “knowledge”, whose main concern was to deny their very right to be in the UK and belong.

The experience of colonisation, exclusion, and racism – of being completely “known” – have produced an explosion of new postcolonial literatures

---

<sup>3</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, “Blacks and the British Empire: An Introduction,” *Black Experience and the Empire*, eds. Morgan and Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 6.

<sup>5</sup> D. Dabydeen et al. eds, *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 87.

<sup>6</sup> J. Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 88.

in English – diverse and powerful body of writing from cultures as various as India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, or Canada. These have challenged both the traditional canon and dominant ideas of literature and culture and “asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre.” They have also attempted to redeem what imperialist and colonialist practices have seized – that primarily being “voice” and control of the “word”, in other words means of interpretation and communication.<sup>7</sup> These issues have most famously been discussed in Ashcroft et al.’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).

Within the context of white supremacy, black women have occupied a very complex position. Their oppression was multiplied by their status of women within the world of male superiority, which, as the following chapter illustrates, also involved the business of knowing of its own kind. Suffering from both racial and gendered forms of oppression simultaneously, their position has often been characterised as “double colonisation”. Inevitably, therefore, Western practices crucial to colonialism and imperialism affected them to larger extent.

Accordingly, black women’s writing back, too, is a more complex issue. As Viola Parente-Čapková emphasised, it emerges both from the conflict with white man’s/ coloniser’s canon, as well as from the clash with white woman’s writing.<sup>8</sup> In their works, black women writers tackle not only issues of racial domination, which have determined the lives of their ancestors more generally, but also focus on determinants of the female situation more specifically. The past, as discussed above, has been a series of losses, reductions, simplifications and forced silences. Writing back therefore inevitably equals efforts to reconstruct what was lost out of its present remains, to reclaim the space in its original form before the coloniser – by means of the business of knowing – reduced it.

In her short essay “Sleeping’s Beauty and Prince Charming”, the Jamaican writer Erna Brodber suggested another way of theorising the concept of double colonisation, using the body – which has always been central to feminism – as its central motif. She describes texts as “the fairy tales of Europe” and asserts that

---

<sup>7</sup> Ashcroft et al. eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1993) 2, 97, book cover by New Accents’ General Editor Terence Hawkins.

<sup>8</sup> V. Parente-Čapková, “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace: Feministická (literární) teorie a postkoloniální studia,” *Konstruování gender v asijských literaturách*. Ed. Blanka Knotková-Čapková. (Praha: Česká orientalistická společnost, 2005) 10.

they have “not only subjectified Jamaican women, but through cultural interpellation effected the erasure of the black female body within Jamaican male culture.” Accordingly, Brodber’s black Prince Charming can sense his female counterpart, but when he looks for her he can see “no/body”.<sup>9</sup> In line with this analogy, black women writers often portray the history of colonisation and slavery as a specific type of injury on the collective remembering body. As H. B. Young noted, “[t]hese types of injury function both actually and metaphorically within the text to give the reader a visceral experience of what it means for this collective body to be injured.”<sup>10</sup>

Wounds, however, also require some form of healing and thereby also function as a metaphor for the urgency of a call for change, an insistent call for delayed justice. In this regard, female body becomes a powerful symbol primarily because of its ability to heal. In its context, wounds do not necessarily have to represent the end, quite on the contrary. For a new life to begin, female body has to undergo regular bleeding, extreme pain, physical harm, wounds of all kinds. In Dorothea Smartt’s words, it is a body marked “with d’living blood,” a body “that bleeds and never dies.”<sup>11</sup> Writing back becomes a means of healing the colonised body, which has been injured to the extent of disappearance – to being a “no/body”.

## 1.2. Selection and rationale

As Roger Bromley noted, “[t]he alternative is always forced to occupy a subordinate – and secondary – space and is tolerated, patronised or suppressed, depending upon the level of its challenge to the hegemonic.”<sup>12</sup> Taking into account the various positions from which black women – as the subaltern – confronted the hegemonic, it is clear that the first two modes of reception are not applicable. Rather, they have been suppressed often almost to the level of invisibility. Although their works have gained some level of recognition over the

---

<sup>9</sup> E. Brodber, “Sleeping’s Beauty and the Prince Charming” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 250.

<sup>10</sup> H. B. Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body* (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2006) 2.

<sup>11</sup> D. Smartt, *Connecting Medium* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011) 59.

<sup>12</sup> R. Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 1.

last few decades, they have seldom been given the scholarly attention or sustained scrutiny they deserve.<sup>13</sup>

Black women writers have been dismissed within both the black literary tradition as well as feminist writing. In this regard, they have largely been conceptualised out of existence because it was coloured men and white women who were taken as the paradigms of the two groups.<sup>14</sup> For both literary traditions, black women's experience was considered insignificant.<sup>15</sup> Black women writers and critics, Michelle Wallace argues, "are routinely kept from having an impact on how the fields of literature and literary criticism are defined and applied."<sup>16</sup> This issue is most concisely expressed by the title of G. T. Hull et al.'s anthology *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*.

Contrary to this practice, this thesis argues for immense significance of black women writers' works. Because of the complex position they occupy within the world of male superiority and white supremacy, black women's perspective is very unique and deserves greater critical attention. Black women – as the above anthology suggests – are brave in that they write back and thereby counter dominant hegemonic discourses of various kinds. As this thesis also shows, due to their multiply marginalised status, their works' applicability extends far beyond the two locations in which most of them are situated – the Caribbean and the UK.

My aim was to conduct an in-depth study of a small sample of authors, rather than provide an overview of a large quantity of authors and their works. Conscious selection therefore preceded the actual analysis of black British female perspective. Two main criteria were involved – geographical and temporal. Firstly, authors were selected based on the place of origin. The Caribbean, or rather countries that constituted the British West Indies, was chosen primarily because of its above discussed long history of colonialism as well as my own personal literary interest in the region. While this criterion may not seem restrictive enough, it itself considerably limits the choice. This is because many of

---

<sup>13</sup> S. A. J. Alexander, *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001) 1.

<sup>14</sup> Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* in A. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) 138.

<sup>15</sup> Cheryl A. Wall, *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage and Literary Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 11.

<sup>16</sup> V. Burrows, *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 11.

the English speaking and writing Caribbean authors relocated to different places in the metropolis, primarily the United States (Jamaica Kincaid, Lorna Goodison, Paule Marshall, or Patricia Powell) and Canada (Marlene Nourbese Philip, Olive Senior, Pamela Mordecai, or Dionne Brand). For some of them, also, England was merely a transit country (Sylvia Wynter). Lastly, some authors, after spending some time in England, returned to their island homes (Merle Hodge). All these authors had to be excluded from the selection.

The choice, already considerably restricted by the “current place of residence” criterion, was further reduced by the temporal criterion. Since focus was to be put on the twenty-first-century works, those authors had to be excluded who, though very important in the second-half of the twentieth century, ceased writing for various reasons. Among these was for example Beryl Gilroy, who died in 2001.

This relatively complex selection process resulted in the final sample of four writers, more particularly Grace Nichols, Jean Binta Breeze, Dorothea Smartt and Andrea Levy. As the following paragraphs illustrate, this sample involves two first- and two second-generation immigrants. It comprises novelists, poets, as well as performance/ live artists. In that regard, while being considerably restricted, the sample is at the same time relatively representative and has thus a potential to provide a balanced account of the issues of interest. It thereby also provides suitable ground for generalisation, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Grace Nichols was born in Guyana in 1950 and moved to the UK at the age of 27. She has written widely for both adults and children. Her adult poetry book *I Is a Long-Memored Woman* (1983) won the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. This thesis focuses on two of her adult collections, more particularly *Startling the Flying Fish* (2006) and *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009). In 2010 Nichols further published *I Have Crossed an Ocean: A Selection of Poems* (2010). Since this work, however, consists of works written earlier in her writing career, it will not be used for our purposes.

Jean Binta Breeze, born in Jamaica in 1956, has lived in England since 1986. She is most popular as a Dub poet and storyteller. As critics have noted, her performances are so powerful that she has been called a “one-woman festival”. Overall, she has published six books, two of which will be the focus of this study.

*The Fifth Figure* (2006) is a book-length sequence mixing poetry and prose. *Third World Girl* (2011), similarly as the above mentioned work by Nichols, brings together new poems with poetry and reggae chants from four Breeze's previous collections. Only the new poems will therefore be referred to in this thesis.

Dorothea Smartt, born (1963) and raised in London, is of Barbadian heritage. Apart from being a widely published poet, she became equally known for her performance poetry and installations.<sup>17</sup> In the 1990s, she contributed to various journals, anthologies and exhibitions. Both her poetry collections - *Connecting Medium* (2001) and *Ship Shape* (2008) – will be analysed in this thesis.

Andrea Levy was born in 1956 in London to Jamaican parents, who arrived to England in 1948 on the Empire Windrush. Unlike the previous three authors, she primarily is a novelist. Overall, she has published five novels, two of which in the twenty-first century, more particularly *Small Island* (2004), which won the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction and was adapted for BBC television and broadcast in 2009, and *The Long Song* (2010).

There are a few reasons why I decided to focus on twenty-first-century works. Firstly, unlike older works by the above writers, these naturally have not received much attention yet. This made me very curious as a reader to find out what the nature of the works is and how it differs from the previously published works. This is very much linked to the second reason, which is how and if the works reflect the character of the twenty-first century, which, more than any other period before, has been marked by increasing migration and globalisation. It is a space of mutual borrowings, series of dialogues simultaneously conducted at various levels, exchanges and intersections across ethnic boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Such world defies easy categorisation; identities are complex, fluid, plural and slippery. Any purity of cultures, origins or identities, for that matter, is of course untenable.<sup>19</sup> It will therefore be interesting to see how black women writers themselves perceive twenty-first-century world, which, I believe, their works inevitably reveal.

---

<sup>17</sup> "Writers: Dorothea Smartt," *British Council Literature*, 17 September 2013 <<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/dorothea-smartt>>.

<sup>18</sup> A. Brah et al., "Thinking identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture," *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture*. Ed. A. Brah (London: Macmillan, 1999)

<sup>19</sup> B. Ashcroft et al. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998) 118.

Moreover, such works also represent suitable material for the discussions of the third space, as will be discussed further down in the research question section.

The fact that there is very little secondary literature on these particular works also determines the character of this study, makes it relatively innovative and also much more enjoyable for its author. Instead of identifying issues and topics first in secondary literature and only then searching for them in works under scrutiny, this thesis is characterised by what is sometimes called a “hands-on approach”. All topics analysed below (i.e. from Chapter 3 on) are derived from close reading of the books. Where relevant, secondary literature was then used to support the author’s claims and assumptions. Such works often had to be used, which deal rather with other writers, often of different ethnic, geographical and social background. The very fact that these were applicable, again, supports my claims for generalisation.

As the following section makes clear, this approach, however, has not been employed at the expense of theory.

### **1.3. Theoretical framework**

Against the two oppressive ideologies – imperial and patriarchal social order – counter discourses developed, which have sought to challenge the existing structures of power. Nevertheless, neither postcolonial theory nor feminism, as it will become clear in the next chapter, have managed to embrace the complexity of black women’s position. Instead, they to a large extent further participate on their discursive colonisation.

In the realm of postcolonial theory, the diasporic condition was theoretically elaborated most notoriously in the work of Homi Bhabha, who felt the need to abjure the dominant dualistic paradigm, binary oppositions of the centre and periphery, the West and the rest, the coloniser and the colonised. To this end, he was concerned with the elaboration of contesting theoretical structures.<sup>20</sup> Using his terms of reference, these authors would represent what Bhabha calls “hybrids”, who are unstuck to the land, rootless, and occupy the Third Space (the beyond), which he defined as “the moment of transit where

---

<sup>20</sup> R. J. C. Young. *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)



space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.”<sup>21</sup> In terms of agency, the Third Space, it is evident, is an empowering environment. This notion was most famously articulated under the concept of mimicry, further developed in the postulate of hybridity. In his work, Bhabha has asserted that the colonised people can speak, that the native voice can be recovered.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Bhabha’s work has been subject to fervent criticism.<sup>23</sup> He has been accused of generalising from his very specific privileged position within the system – that of a light-skinned metropolitan intellectual – and imposing his experience on those further down the hierarchy. Therefore, while his concept of hybridity was supposed to stand for inclusiveness, dialogism, subversion and contestation of grand narratives,<sup>24</sup> it actually came to be considered the very opposite – exclusive, monologue-like, a grand narrative itself. Instead of giving voice to the marginalised, it was criticised for silencing them.

While postcolonial theory came to be very much based on a rather essentialised image of a privileged light-skinned male intellectual, feminist theory conceptualised gender via the experience of middle class, urban, white women. Already in 1979, Audre Lorde outlined the major points of contention in her famous “An Open Letter to Mary Daly”. Primarily, she criticised white women for their “inability to listen to and dialogue with black women, the negative representation of black women, and the inability to recognise issues specific to women of colour, such as forced sterilization.” Again primarily due to differences in material histories, black feminists found it difficult to accept an unproblematic sisterhood with their white counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

Needs of ethnic minority women have primarily been articulated by theorists who challenged both Western feminism and postcolonial theory in the form that Bhabha represented. Often labelled postcolonial feminists, these come from different ethnic, social and geographical backgrounds. Among them are the following: Chandra Mohanty (\*1950) and Gayatri Spivak (\*1942), Indian-born

---

<sup>21</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) 2.

<sup>22</sup> B. Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 41.

<sup>23</sup> See for example: J. Friedman; A. Ahmad, A. Acheraïou, or B. Parry.

<sup>24</sup> A. Acheraïou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 108-109.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lorde, “An Open Letter to Mary Daly” in *Haunting Capital* 25.

theorists currently residing in the USA; Sara Suleri (\*1953), born in Pakistan, currently living in England; or Trinh T. Minh (\*1950), who was born in Vietnam and relocated to the US.

In contrast to both postcolonial theory and feminist theory, Gayatri Spivak opposed the idea of too easy a recovery of the “voice” or “agency” of colonised peoples. As Ashcroft et al. explain, particularly in her accounts of the double subjection of colonised women and her discussion of the silencing of the muted native subject, in the form of the “subaltern” woman, Spivak has argued that “[t]here is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak.”<sup>26</sup> Although Spivak locates her analysis primarily in British governed India, the silencing of the subaltern woman, by implication, “extends to the whole of the colonial world, and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male or female.”<sup>27</sup>

Other theoretical works will be referred to throughout this thesis, among them for example Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, or Lukács’s discussion of *The Historical Novel*.

#### **1.4. Research questions**

This thesis aims to examine the concept of writing back – the process of healing the wounds of the collective body – in twenty-first-century works by selected British Caribbean women writers. Writing back, as discussed above, is an attempt to reconstruct what was suppressed or erased by hegemonic discourses. Based on the character of these discourses, the discussion will be centred on reclamation of the land and the past – the geographical and the temporal levels. How do the writers write the land? How do they write the past? And how is the black female body involved? The following question, asked by Bhabha himself, will also be relevant to our discussion and points out to the link between the land and the past in works under scrutiny: “If, as they say, the past is a foreign country, then what does it mean to encounter a past that is your own country [/ body] reterritorialised, even terrorised by another?”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 103.

<sup>27</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 179.

<sup>28</sup> *The Location of Culture* 283-284.

Contrary to Spivak's assertion, British Caribbean women writers under scrutiny evidently attempt to create a space from which the subaltern can speak – a healing vision, an empowering space, space of agency, which reflects their attempt to revise and dismantle the settled discursive hierarchies and is key to the process of writing back. This space will therefore be examined and assessed against the most dominant theories of migrant agency, as introduced in the theoretical framework section.

As noted, Bhabha's concepts have been considered very much limited in that his privileged position was identified as a paradigm as well as an ideal.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, at the time it was published, Bhabha's theory was often seen as too progressive, as coming too early and not reflecting the present state of the world. Yet, migration was viewed by many as “the quintessential experience of the twentieth century.”<sup>30</sup> In Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meat*, the narrator asserts that in “the next millennium the idea of an indigenous person or plant or culture will just seem quaint.”<sup>31</sup> If the twentieth-century did not, twenty-first century must therefore represent an even more suitable environment for Bhabha's progressive concepts. This thesis therefore aims to examine their relevance for the discussion of works by writers who, though living in the twenty-first-century metropolis, are both black and women.

### 1.5. Limitations

As noted at the very beginning of this chapter, the specific focus on British Caribbean writers is bound to provide an insight into the perspective of a third world woman living in the metropolis. This generalisation, however, inevitably has its limitations, which have to be defined right at the beginning.

Primarily, the very notion of the third world woman is very problematic as there undoubtedly are differences between different kinds of diasporic experiences and exiles. These are determined by such factors as location, class, ethnic background, age or individual temperament. The essentialised notion of the third world woman constructed by Western feminist discourse has also been a

---

<sup>29</sup> *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* 108-109.

<sup>30</sup> John Berger, *And our Faces, my Heart, Brief as Photos in Narratives for a New Belonging* 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meat in Narratives for a New Belonging* 94.

target of fervent criticism by the above postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty, Spivak, or Suleri.

On the other hand, this problematic label, as Spivak or Mohanty make clear, can also be used for political goals in the context of what they call strategic essentialism, as analysed for example by Viola Parente-Čapková. A notion of the third world woman, which is basically constructed politically based on its position within the prevalent power order, can thereby be used against the discourse which produced it, as a sort of a political weapon of the powerless against the powerful. As Spivak emphasises, the fact that this praxis is in conflict with theory does not represent a problem. Quite on the contrary, conflicts between theory and praxis are desirable since they create opportunities for productive intellectual activity. The essentialising practice, however, can only then be called a strategy when it is conscious and constantly reflected.<sup>32</sup>

Overall, my work is informed by awareness that diversity exists and therefore avoids easy generalisation and excessive ambitiousness. However, as Bruce Robbins noted, “thinking small is not enough.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, I will retain the right to engage in what he describes as difficult generalisation, which will be justified throughout this thesis. One of the forms of such justification will also be constant references to black women writers from different geographical contexts, as already the theoretical framework and rationale sections made clear.

Another limitation of this thesis is the realm of the text. Though, as van der Veer fittingly noted, “[t]here may be nothing outside the text, as Derrida proposes, (...) there is certainly something outside the literary text.”<sup>34</sup> When generalising, this work will be informed by the fact that the position of a writer is always to some extent privileged as opposed to that of migrants living on the suburbs, struggling to earn a living, surviving from day to day. This thesis, therefore, does not aim to go beyond the text since in reality, its author believes, application of Bhabha’s theory is even more restricted than in the literary milieu.

---

<sup>32</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak” in “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 29.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Comparative Cosmopolitanism,” in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 3.

<sup>34</sup> P. van der Veer, “‘The enigma of arrival’: Hybridity and authenticity in the global space,” *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, eds. P. Werbner and T. Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997) 103.

At the same time, however, this thesis emerges from awareness of the high significance of literature for the twenty-first-century world, which will also be discussed throughout this thesis. As Ashcroft et al. noted, literature offers one of the most important ways in which new and alternative perceptions are expressed. It is also in the writing of migrants themselves and “through other arts such as painting, sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonised peoples have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influential.”<sup>35</sup> Relevance of works by black women writers to reality will be one of the key issues discussed throughout this thesis.

### **1.6. Terminology and ethical issues**

The term “black” is undoubtedly tainted as it is a product of the polarising discourse, which has been instrumental in establishing the gap between “us” and “them”, the norm and the other, and thereby to marginalisation and oppression of people around the world. Yet, it has been used by influential academics all over the world, in various important theoretical works and anthologies listed in the reference section. As Edward Said also explained, no one can escape dealing with such binary divisions as East/ West, North/ South, or white/ coloured. No matter how much we disagree with them, “[w]e cannot get around them all by pretending they do not exist.”<sup>36</sup> This only intensifies the divisions and makes them both vicious and permanent. The use of the term has therefore been defined by what Spivak called strategic essentialism to designate people of African or Afro-Caribbean heritage, in other words those perceived as black by the dominant discourse. In the same way, it will be used – as well as quoted from other sources – throughout this thesis. Similar explanation regards the use of terms such as “race”, “third world”, or the binary terms of “East” and “West”.

The term “colonisation” will also be employed in a largely generalised way, more particularly to denote not only territorial, but also patriarchal domination. Roger Bromley asserted that “[w]e need to avoid the by now conditioned reflex of using ‘colonisation’ as a catch-all metaphor for a range of

---

<sup>35</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Orientalism* 327.

distinctively different oppressions.”<sup>37</sup> Yet such use, this thesis shows, is important in exposing parallels between the various marginalisations black women have faced.

### **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

To lay the foundations for analysis of the concept of writing back, this thesis begins with a chapter that examines the character of the hegemonic discourses. It clarifies the above mentioned notion of double colonisation and further elaborates on the complex position of black women. Focus is put on the intersections and mutual intensification of different types of domination, primarily imperial/ territorial and patriarchal/ sexual.

Chapter 3 focuses on the geographical aspect of writing back. It analyses the link between the Caribbean and England, which has been established in works by many British Caribbean women writers. Emphasis is put on the connection between the land and the body, which Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy establish as part of their strategy of making the colonisers` strategies visible before dismantling them.

Chapter 4 turns from the geographical to the temporal. It examines particular means Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy employ another classic topic of British immigrant writing – reconstruction of the past. Here, too, the body plays a central role. Accordingly, among the key concepts discussed will be “bodymemory”.

Chapter 5 will then analyse the new spaces, which emerge when the geographical and the temporal – the place and time - cross. This space – the healing vision – will be discussed in terms of empowerment, productivity and agency both for the characters of the works and for their authors as well as for the society more generally.

Chapter 6 eventually provides a conclusion of this thesis. Primarily, the outcomes of the previous chapters will be related to theory. Moving on from the specific focus on British Caribbean women writers, broader links will be made,

---

<sup>37</sup> *Narratives for a New Belonging* 17.

situating this local issue into the global order and justifying my initial claims for generalisation.

Individual chapters of this thesis will inevitably be closely interlinked and certain motifs will be referred to throughout the thesis. This also testifies to the richness of the emerging space and various intersections between individual layers. The motif of the female body, which has been central to both feminist analyses of gender as well as postcolonial discussions of race, will function as a central thread of this work.

Heroines of the above listed works will also function as another linking factor. Among them are primarily the following: Grace Nichols' Dora Maar, a product of Picasso's art, a woman "framed" in the picture, which is on display in Tate Gallery; Jean Binta Breeze's multi-layered woman created through five generations of females – Emma, Susan, Amanda, Sheba and one nameless female descendant; or Andrea Levy's female slaves – Kitty and her daughter July. Further more abstract women will be introduced and discussed, more particularly ancestral black women – Smartt's Medusa or Nichols' Cariwoma – or Breeze's Third World Girl.

## **2. Multiple marginalisation of black women**

Within the colonial and patriarchal social order imposed by colonialism and its after-effects, black women occupy a very complex position.<sup>38</sup> To describe it, postcolonial feminist discourses have employed the term “double colonisation”, which implies oppression by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies and contrasts their position with the single colonisation of European women. Though this term became a popular catch-phrase, it is only recently that it has begun to be adequately theorised.<sup>39</sup>

This chapter aims to examine some of the dimensions of the term. To this end, it will first discuss parallels between gender and racial discrimination. As will be made clear below, at the centre of both is the body – both in form of the female body and the “other” body. In case of black women, however, these two modes of othering intersect and become mutually intensifying.

The chapter will also focus on the two discourses – feminist and postcolonialist – which emerged to challenge the two oppressive ideologies – patriarchal and imperial order respectively. Building upon the theoretical framework introduction, further analysis will be conducted of black women’s position within them.

Such discussion is essential for our further literary research, since it is impossible to study the counter-discourse without first illuminating the discourse itself. This chapter therefore provides foundation for understanding of the concept of writing back in selected works by Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy.

### **2.1. Patriarchal and imperial domination: the body and the land**

Throughout the twentieth century, parallels have been drawn between racial and gender discrimination. In the language of colonialism, Helen Carr argues, non-Europeans obviously occupy the same symbolic space as women,

---

<sup>38</sup> A. Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments In Anglophone Literary History* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 138.

<sup>39</sup> *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 250.



who have been “colonised” by various forms of patriarchal domination.<sup>40</sup> According to Ania Loomba, “lower races represented the ‘female’ type of the human species, and females the ‘lower race’ of gender.”<sup>41</sup> Franz Fanon perceived racial and gender privilege as so intertwined that he evoked castration to describe racial disempowerment.<sup>42</sup> As *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* also asserts, women and colonised peoples share “an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression.”<sup>43</sup> The analogy between the relationship of men and women and those of the imperial power and the colony has also been drawn in literary works by such diverse authors as Jean Rhys, Toni Morrison, Doris Lessing, Paule Marshall, or Margaret Atwood.<sup>44</sup>

Both women and colonial subjects have been relegated to the position of the “other”. This means that they have been subjected to the process of “knowing”, which underpinned both imperial and patriarchal dominance. The gap between “us” and “them” was, in both cases, seen as evolutionary. The other has been described as passive, child-like, basically at a lower stage of development and therefore in need of guidance, leadership and governance. The other, it is clear, was not denied the capacity for progress, which, however, could only be achieved under the guidance and leadership of the white man. As Susheila Nasta points out, “colonised nations have frequently been represented by Europeans as ‘female’ requiring ‘paternal governance’ by the dominant power.”<sup>45</sup> Similar rhetoric has therefore been used to explain and justify their subjugation.

Racial othering has been central to territorial domination and thereby to the whole colonial/ imperial ideology. In accordance with the parallels between racial and gender discrimination, gender hierarchy was also involved to support colonial invasions and conquests, most importantly in the form of the female body.

The analogy between sexual domination, whose centre is the body, and territorial domination, whose centre is the land, becomes most apparent in the phenomenon of feminisation of colonised lands. Female bodies have symbolised

---

<sup>40</sup> H. Carr, “Woman/Indian, the ‘American’ and his Others” in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 137.

<sup>42</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 137.

<sup>43</sup> *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 249.

<sup>44</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 32.

<sup>45</sup> S. Nasta, ed., *Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd, 1991) xiv.

the unknown and conquered land from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond, as Ania Loomba noted).<sup>46</sup> Although this metaphoric use of the female body varied based on particular geographical context and colonial situation, women – embodying the territory – were portrayed as spatially spread for male exploration.<sup>47</sup> The sexual promise of the woman`s body came to indicate the wealth promised by the colonies; the female`s vulnerability to men`s advance, her subservience were all indicative of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised.

Not only were the newly “discovered” lands feminised; they were also subjected to the myth of the virgin land. Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, described Guyana as “a countrey that hath yet her maidenhead”<sup>48</sup> and was ready to be deflowered by Europe. In accordance with what was said above, the colonisers were to explore virginal territories, penetrate and conquer them; they were to take possession of them. The notion of a virgin land was powerful in that it implied an empty land and thereby enabled the colonisers to deprive the colonised of aboriginal territorial rights. The white man was to inseminate the barbaric lands with “civilised” Western ideas and values.

This virginisation, as discussed in the introduction, involved erasure of local history, myths, peoples, and languages, in other words all indicators of the fact that the land had been inhabited and thereby “belonged” to somebody else. This process is illustrated by re-naming of the territory whereby the coloniser imposed new names on mountains and other geographical sites, ignoring and erasing the aboriginal ones, those that carried a meaning, reflected native history or mythology.

Both femininity and unknown lands (i.e. their inhabitants) also represented the exotic, something that defies rational understanding. In this context, Ania Loomba mentions Freud, who “expressed his incomprehension of the sexual life of women by calling it a ‘dark continent’.”<sup>49</sup> The uncertain far-away places were also “othered” by being connected with deviant sexuality. They had become what McClintock calls “a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic

---

<sup>46</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 129.

<sup>47</sup> A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Imperial Leather* 30; *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 78.

<sup>49</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 161.

magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.”<sup>50</sup> Not only far-away places, but also non-Europeans more generally – racial and cultural others – were constructed as sexually anomalous, uncontrolled or libidinally excessive. These notions were supported by various travellers’ tales, which abounded with visions of monstrous sexuality in terms of, for example, gigantic penises, homosexuality, cross-dressing, harem stories, licentiousness, sodomy, or immoral, promiscuous and libidinal individuals.<sup>51</sup> These accounts “offered Europeans the possibility of transgressing their rigid sexual mores.”<sup>52</sup> At the same time, they were largely based on “the assumption that darker races or non-Europeans were immoral, promiscuous, and always desirous of white people.”<sup>53</sup> While reflecting white man’s fantasies and desires, they therefore justified colonial occupation under the guise of the white man’s “civilising mission”.

Within the European porno-tropics, native women inevitably figured as “the epitome of sexual aberration and excess.” Even more than the men, they were seen as “given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial.”<sup>54</sup> Such conceptions were supported by early medical discourse, which asserted that black women’s innate deviancy was further signalled externally, primarily by what was considered primitive genitalia and a condition known as steatopygia – large protruding buttocks. Hottentot women were considered the quintessential example of such internal as well as external features. This also provided the rationale for the capture of Saartje Baartman, a member of the Khoi-San tribe, who was brought to Europe and displayed as eroticised/ medical entertainment – a collection of deviant sexual parts. Her genitalia were on display even after her death and for “scientists” they represented a proof of black female sexual deviancy.<sup>55</sup>

Such medical exploitation functioned as another means of justification of colonial sexual encounters. Even though these undoubtedly exploited inequities of class, age, gender, race and power, in colonial fiction and travelogues they are

---

<sup>50</sup> *Imperial Leather* 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 132-134.

<sup>52</sup> Ronal Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience in Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 134.

<sup>53</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 134.

<sup>54</sup> *Imperial Leather* 22.

<sup>55</sup> *Haunting Capital* 4-5.

often embedded within a myth of reciprocity. As Loomba specifies, similarly as colonial trade, colonial sexual encounters were projected as “a transaction desired by both parties, an enterprise mutually beneficial and entered into via the exercise of free will.” This myth presents women as being nurtured, liberated, and civilised by the European male.<sup>56</sup>

As Kaneh explains, this civilising mission again took very different forms in different parts of the world based on the type of gendering of imperialism. North African, Middle Eastern and Asian women, who were subjected to “the colonialist offensive against the veil,” were to be “civilised” by being undressed (i.e. unveiled). Sub-Saharan women, on the other hand, were to be civilised by being dressed, targeted by “the missionary offensive against the breasts.” In both cases, women were to be saved from the oppression by their male counterparts, who either oppressed them by overdressing them by covering them, or by undressing them. Civilisation and Christianity were to neutralise their bodies.<sup>57</sup> According to McClintock, “[t]hese sumptuary distinctions were symptomatic of critical differences in the legislative, economic and political ways in which imperial commodity racism was imposed on different parts of the world.”<sup>58</sup>

Gendering of the imperial unknown was also very much determined by various uncertainties and unknowns referred to throughout the preceding paragraphs. It was therefore redolent not only of male megalomania and imperial aggression but also of anxiety and fear, which occurred as an aftermath of male boundary loss. Crossing the borders of the unknown worlds was accompanied by “the simultaneous dread of catastrophic boundary loss (implosion), associated with fears of impotence and infantilization (...).”<sup>59</sup> Feminisation of the unknown – i.e. representation of the land as a female – then becomes a compensatory gesture (or a traumatic trope) whereby men reinscribe boundary and order through imposition of gender hierarchy – i.e. in the form that to them seems most stable and natural. It also illustrated the European men’s need to assert dominance. Accordingly, Bhabha, Gilman, or Hall, too, viewed stereotypes as momentary coping mechanisms used to protect oneself from feelings of insecurity by denying

---

<sup>56</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 134.

<sup>57</sup> K. Kaneh, “Feminism and the Colonial Body,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 347.

<sup>58</sup> *Imperial Leather* 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Imperial Leather* 24-26.

them and projecting them upon the other. Through stereotypes, the other is produced as entirely knowable and visible.<sup>60</sup>

Insecurity and fear, however, were also provoked by colonial sexual encounters, which suggested the instability of race as a category and thereby questioned the very foundations of colonialism. Again in line with the territorial analogy discussed above, female bodies represented the border of “racial purity”. This regarded women on both sides of the colonial divide who “demarcate both the innermost sanctums of race, culture and nation, as well as the porous frontiers through which these are penetrated.”<sup>61</sup> Already in the eighteenth century, Edward Long expressed his fear that because the lower class of women in England are fond of the black men, “the English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture (...) [that] the whole nation resembles Portuguese and Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind.”<sup>62</sup> Similar worries were expressed in the 1950s by the Tories, who, as James Winston asserted, “feared the contamination of the British ‘stock’ (...) or the racial character of the British people.”<sup>63</sup>

Sexuality, it is evident, represented a means for the maintenance or erosion of racial difference.<sup>64</sup> Yet black female sexuality, as illustrated above, was at the centre of the whole colonial encounter. Black female bodies represented not only public sexual service available to the colonisers. At the same time it was black female sexuality that became the backbone of plantation economies during transatlantic slavery. Female slave bodies were transformed into reproductive technologies – potential source of further manpower for the plantations. Planters practiced what Gray White called “passive, though insidious, kind of breeding”. This means that they used their authority to make binding and permanent the relationships they themselves had initiated. It was, however, still the owner – the planter – who owned the woman’s body and decided about her childbearing ability. Female slaves’ reproductive organs were turned into units of production. Accordingly, female bodies – owned and captive as goods – were considered most profitable if they were healthy and fertile, reproductive; their value was assessed

---

<sup>60</sup> H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; S. Gilman, *Difference & Pathology, Stereotypes & Sexuality, Race & Madness*; S. Hall, “The Spectacle of the Other.”

<sup>61</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 159.

<sup>62</sup> James Walvin, *The Black Presence* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1971) 69.

<sup>63</sup> “The Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain” 370.

<sup>64</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 159.

based on measurable and quantifiable criteria. Infertile women, Gray White noted, “could (...) expect to be treated like barren sows and be passed from one unsuspecting buyer to the next.”<sup>65</sup> The same applied for women past their breeding time. The body, again, is territorialised in that it is publicly and financially claimed, owned, and controlled by an outsider.<sup>66</sup>

## **2.2. Postcolonial and feminist theory**

As it is clear from the previous section, feminist and postcolonial discourses struggle against oppression – be it patriarchal or imperial – which is not dissimilar. As Ashcroft et al. put it, they both seek to “reinststate the marginalised in the face of the dominant.” Early feminist like early nationalist postcolonial criticism sought to invert the structures of domination. Both have also recently turned away from such simple inversions towards a more complex questioning of forms and modes. Although their histories have largely been parallel, until recently their theoretical trajectories have rarely intersected.<sup>67</sup>

Black women experience what Mae Henderson called the awareness of “racial difference within gender identity” and “gender difference within racial identity.”<sup>68</sup> They are therefore forced to struggle for equality both as women and as blacks against two worlds simultaneously – “one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed.”<sup>69</sup> This resulted in needs and problems different both from white women and from black men. Neither of the two discourses has therefore managed to accommodate these.

Their separate development exposed black women to the danger of being completely dismissed. Black women have largely been subjected to discursive colonisation within both feminist discourse as well as postcolonial discourse. In both of them, black women function as projection of otherness, against which the dominant group creates its identity and autonomy. The following two subsections

---

<sup>65</sup> Deborah Gray White, “The Life Cycle of the Female Slave,” *The Girls` History and Culture Reader: The Nineteenth Century*, eds. Miriam Forman-Brunell, Leslie Paris (University of Illinois, 2011) 22.

<sup>66</sup> K. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 44-46.

<sup>67</sup> *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 249.

<sup>68</sup> *Worrying the Line* 6.

<sup>69</sup> Cannon, “The Emergence of a Black Feminist Consciousness” in “Defining Black Feminist Thought”.

analyse black women`s position within the two discourses – the edging out of coloured women from the production and shaping of both postcolonial and feminist knowledge.

### **2.2.1. Black women within Western feminist discourse**

The complexities of black women`s oppression were very much ignored by Western feminist discourse. Since the late 1970s black women have consistently challenged and criticised Eurocentric feminism. They emphasised the need to reassess foundations of Western feminist thought and thereby also most of its conclusions.<sup>70</sup> Such challenge began with the intellectual work of Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins and continued with women such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith and Alice Walker.<sup>71</sup> Among the most prominent present-day critics of Western feminism are: Chandra Talpade Mohanty, G. C. Spivak, bell hooks, Hazel Carby, Rachel Carby, Valerie Amos, or Pratibha Parmar. Their works will therefore be referred to throughout the following paragraphs.

Among the major points of contention was the notion of essential womanhood (the singular category of “Woman”) that forms the foundation of Western feminist thought. Women, Mohanty argued, are considered a homogeneous coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of other aspects of their identity such as class, ethnicity, social background or geographical location.<sup>72</sup> Western feminist discourse privileges gender over all other conflicts and falsely separates gender differences from other important issues. Moreover, gender is conceptualised via the experience of middle class, urban, white women. Hazel Carby, for example, accused white feminists of writing their “herstory” and calling it the story of women. Mohanty, Carby and other black feminists argued for the recognition of diversity among women, including varied histories and imbalances of power.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Haunting Capital* 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ch. T. Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. (London: Routledge, 2003) 259.

<sup>73</sup> *Imperial Leather* 7-11.

The complete disregard for factors other than gender is also evident in the treatment of some classic feminist topics such as the mother-daughter image. On one hand, Western feminists, as Burrows noted, undoubtedly “enriched ways of thinking about sexual difference and subjectivity in the context of the mother-daughter dynamic.” In maternal life, however, the themes of gender and sexual difference are often accompanied by racial domination. Mother-daughter relationship is always embedded in a socio-cultural racialised context.<sup>74</sup> As also Hill Collins argued in her important essay, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood”, “non-white mothers frequently experience different forms of relationship with their daughters as a result of factors that range from poverty and racism to the structural injustices of workplace practices.” Different theoretical insights and angles of vision are therefore applied to their mother-daughter experiences and practices, which will also be illustrated in more detail in Chapter 3. Yet white feminists have failed to recognise such factors as differentials in mothering/ daughtering experience.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, this singular category of “Woman”, created by feminist scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses, is constituted via dependency relationships vis-à-vis men, in other words on the basis of a shared oppression by an essential masculinity. Much feminist discourse, black feminists argued, is characterised by an assumption of a homogeneous, cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of male dominance.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, men are automatically held responsible for these relationships. However, as the case of colonised men illustrates, male-female relationship is often problematised by other factors. On the side of the colonised, pre-existing gender hierarchies were very much affected by colonialism, which inevitably intensified patriarchal oppression. Men, who belong to, in various ways, “colonised” peoples and are therefore disenfranchised and excluded from the public spheres, often become more tyrannical at home. According to Ania Loomba, this is because “they seize upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality.”<sup>77</sup> Sara Suleri also noted that patriarchal systems

---

<sup>74</sup> *Whiteness and Trauma* 3.

<sup>75</sup> P. H. Collins, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood” in *Whiteness and Trauma* 3.

<sup>76</sup> “Under Western Eyes” 261.

<sup>77</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 141.



were often supported by the colonial power, which was for example the case of Pakistan where the process of institution of Muslim Law was “facilitated by neo-colonial United States` support of a male regime where laws against rape have recoiled horrifically on the bodies of women and children.”<sup>78</sup> Black feminists argued for recognition of the diversity of oppression and patriarchy; male violence, they argued, must be interpreted within specific societies. This is essential both in order to understand it better as well as to effectively organise to change it.<sup>79</sup>

As also Mohanty argued, an analysis based on reductive categorisation, which structures society into the victims and the oppressors, leads to the construction of a similarly reductive image of an “average third world woman”, whose situation is made more difficult by the homogeneous notion of the “third world difference”, in other words an evolutionary gap. Third world woman`s life is truncated not only based on her feminine gender, but further by being “third world”, i.e. ignorant, poor uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, and family oriented – characteristics, which imperial discourse ascribes to colonised peoples or racial others.<sup>80</sup> This “third world woman” is constructed as politically inactive, passive and needing the white woman to represent her and talk for her. As Mohanty noted, she can never rise above the debilitating generality of her object status.<sup>81</sup> Inevitably, again, the notion of the third world woman is produced as singular and monolithic as it ignores and appropriates fundamental complexities which characterise the lives of women in the third world, be it religion, class, or caste.

This image of the “third world woman” is constructed in contrast to the self-representation of the white Western woman as educated, modern, active, more advanced and developed. White women, in contrast to black women, are speaking and acting subjects; they are capable of acquiring control over their own bodies and sexualities, as well as freedom to make their own decisions. It is this white, middle-class, heterosexual, urban woman, who, until the 1980s, became the

---

<sup>78</sup> *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 250.

<sup>79</sup> “Under Western Eyes” 260.

<sup>80</sup> “Under Western Eyes” 261.

<sup>81</sup> “Under Western Eyes” in “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” 274-275.

true – since in the eyes of Western feminists also the only possible – subject of the counter discourse, of the struggle against male oppression.<sup>82</sup>

This notion, Spivak suggests, is a consequence of the fact that feminist conceptions of individuality developed under the influence of the imperialist discourse, which marginalised and dehumanised women other than white.<sup>83</sup> The discursive colonisation is apparent primarily from the above described “third world difference”, which becomes an instrument of power and enables Western feminism to establish itself as the only legitimate feminism.<sup>84</sup> Western feminism then becomes a colonising agent itself.

Apart from creating new inequalities, Western feminists, as black women argued, overlook historical imbalances in power between women and ignore the ways in which white women have benefited from colonisation and the oppression of black people more generally. Although it was white men who were the most direct agents of empire, white women were superior in the context of racial hierarchy and held power over both colonised women and colonised men. They were to a large extent complicit in the system.<sup>85</sup> To acknowledge such imbalances was seen by black women as key for assuming sisterhood across ethnic boundaries.

### **2.2.2. Black women within postcolonial theory**

Postcolonial theory, too, has developed as a counter discourse – to imperial oppression. While feminist discourse opposed gender categorisation, postcolonial theory sought to liberate the world from racial/ ethnic categorisation, othering and dichotomies created to justify marginalisation and discrimination during the period of slavery and beyond. To this end, it offered notions of hybridity, plurality, fluidity of identities, or rootlessness.

Postcolonial theory, however, abounds with hierarchies and hegemonies of various types, too. Primarily, it is its very representatives, who, as some noted, are products of the star system of US and Western academia and are selected based on

---

<sup>82</sup> “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 10.

<sup>83</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak” in “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 10.

<sup>84</sup> “Under Western Eyes” 263.

<sup>85</sup> *Imperial Leather* 6.

Western aesthetic criteria. Elleke Boehmer emphasised that it privileges such “postcolonial authors”, who, on the one hand, use techniques popular in the West, and, on the other hand, are “different” enough. Language, too, is a decisive factor since English-writing authors are privileged over those writing in languages of other colonisers (e.g. in Spanish, French or Dutch), let alone writers using languages of the colonised nations.<sup>86</sup>

Such light-skinned male metropolitan intellectuals, who are inherently economically and socially privileged, then become the “the true subjects of the struggle against imperial oppression.” Generalising from their own privileged experience of the postcolonial condition, they create a space from which all migrant experience can be assessed, an amorphous “metamorphization of postcolonial migrancy.”<sup>87</sup> Analogically with Hazel Carby’s accusation of white feminists, postcolonial theorists have been criticised for writing “theirstory” and calling it the story of all migrant peoples. Their postcolonial condition, however, inevitably differs from that of the masses, those living on the margins of the metropolis, the poor, the working classes, those who stayed behind in the colonies, of women.

Unlike the notion of the third world woman produced by Western feminist discourses, the singular and monolithic “average postcolonial individual” is empowered, i.e. occupies the third space where history and geography cease to exist as restrictive categories, but, on the contrary, enable productive spaces to emerge. It thereby neglects fatal consequences of imperialism, its negative effects on colonised peoples of the world, and imbalances of power based on various aspects of identity, be it religion, class, geographical location, or gender. Postcolonial discourse, while aiming to struggle against imperialism, has been accused of acting as a colonising agent itself, of reinscribing boundaries. This is because it has failed to accommodate the needs and experience of those who have indeed suffered from imperial/ colonial oppression as these became object of the universalising tendencies of privileged postcolonial individuals. Within this, women were not even recognised.

---

<sup>86</sup> “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 15.

<sup>87</sup> B. Ledent, *Caryl Phillips* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 175.

Taking into account the importance of gender for the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise, as it was described above, it is not surprising that postcolonial theory becomes especially unstable in relation to women. Apart from his neglect of class and social inequalities, Bhabha was often criticised for his “unpardonable sidelining of gender,” for neglecting the gendered and sexual implications of postcolonial condition.<sup>88</sup> As H. B. Young emphasised, gender and sexuality remain largely unexplored, “either merely signalled as ‘indices of differentiation’ (...) or introduced tangentially in discussions of race as a masculinist narrative of heterosexual familial (re)constructions.”<sup>89</sup>

Although elite native men may have found a way to “speak”, Spivak and others suggest that “for those further down the hierarchy, self-representation was not a possibility.”<sup>90</sup>

### **2.3. Postcolonial feminism**

In the context of the above discussion, black/ native/ colonised women undoubtedly were further down the hierarchy compared to both white women and black/ native/ colonised men. According to Gayatri Spivak, postcolonial writers such as Homi Bhabha or Salman Rushdie, or even a radical critic like Foucault have no “conception of the extent of the colonial repression, and especially of the way in which it historically intersected with patriarchy.” Spivak’s critique of Western feminism has already been discussed above. While both discourses are radically liberating in their specific arenas, they to a large extent act as a colonising agent in another, or, in Spivak’s words, they conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject.<sup>91</sup>

In order to draw attention to their own complex positioning, as Ania Loomba explains, “black and postcolonial feminists and women’s activists have had to challenge both the colour prejudices within white feminism and the gender-blindness of anti-racist or anti-colonial movements.” As it is evident from the above discussed issues, Spivak conducted such a challenge and counteracted the

---

<sup>88</sup> R. Young, *White Mythologies* in A. Blunt and B. Wills, *Dissident Geographies: An Introduction to Radical Ideas and Practice* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000) 189.

<sup>89</sup> *Haunting Capital* 19.

<sup>90</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 195.

<sup>91</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 66.

objectivism of both discourses by inserting the black woman as a category oppressed simultaneously by colonisers and colonised, men and women.<sup>92</sup> Her views have most famously been articulated in her 1985 essays “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and “Three Women’s Texts and the Critique of Imperialism”.

In the former text, Spivak turned to the self-immolation of Hindu widows to illustrate her point that the figure of the native woman disappears between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, tradition and modernisation. The ritual – whereby the widow ascended the pyre of the dead husband and immolated herself upon it – was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British colonial administration has generally been understood and presented as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men.” White women, Spivak noted, have not produced an alternative understanding. In contrast to the sentence, there therefore only existed the Indian nativist argument, or what Spivak calls the nostalgia for lost origins – i.e. that “the women actually wanted to die.”<sup>93</sup>

Although it was brown women – those burnt on their husbands’ pyres as satis – who were at the centre of the whole discussion that surrounded the British government’s legislations against the practice, their testimony was completely missing and their voice-consciousness buried under the two dialectically interlocking sentences voiced by the coloniser on one hand and by the colonised men on the other.<sup>94</sup> In the immolation debates, Loomba explains, the intermixed violence of colonialism and patriarchy resulted in the complete absence of women’s voices – of satis as subjects.<sup>95</sup> Sati thereby becomes a symbol of the silenced female subject symbol who, instead of speaking herself, is being spoken for.

In the latter essay – “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” – Spivak criticises Western feminist isolationist admiration for the European and Anglo-American literature produced under the influence of imperialism which shaped the cultural representation of England to the English as well as the

---

<sup>92</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 138, 195.

<sup>93</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 93.

<sup>94</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 93.

<sup>95</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 185.

“worldling” of the Third World. She specifically refers to nineteenth-century British literature and illustrates her point in an analysis of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Spivak’s theorisations of the silence of doubly-oppressed women provoked reactions of such critics as Benita Parry, who accused Spivak of “deliberate deafness to the native voice where it can be heard.” Referencing her “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Parry asserted that Spivak effectively wrote out “the evidence of native agency recorded in India’s 200 year struggle against British conquest and the Raj – discourses to which she scathingly refers as hegemonic nativist or reverse ethnocentric narrativization.” In her discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Spivak, according to Parry, also denied native women agency by overlooking traces of specifically female agency both within the text as well as in Caribbean cultures more generally. According to Parry, Spivak was insensitive to the various ways in which native women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists.<sup>96</sup> These are relevant both to the character of Antoinette/ Bertha and Christophine. Parry also opposed Spivak’s argument that the colonised cannot be written back into history.

Spivak responded by warning against nostalgia for lost origins and authenticity. She opposed the idea of silence interpreted as agency and argued that the subaltern cannot be given their voice back since they have never had one.<sup>97</sup> In other words, she firmly advocates her opinion that the subaltern cannot speak.

## **2.4. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has illustrated parallels between gender and racial discrimination. This analysis also provided an insight into the ways different types of othering worked together to create the complex position that black women occupy within the world of male superiority and white supremacy.

Corresponding parallels have existed between the development of postcolonial theory and feminism as counter discourses against the two oppressive ideologies. While black feminists were sympathetic to some aspects of the white feminist struggle as well as of the postcolonial discourse, neither of the two

---

<sup>96</sup> “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse” 39-40.

<sup>97</sup> “Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace” 28; *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 195-196.

managed to accommodate their needs and interests. To create a more inclusive discourse, critics like Gayatri Spivak have articulated the relationship between feminism and discourse of postcoloniality.

By introducing the discourses that excluded black women, this chapter provided a basis for further discussion of black women`s writing back. This process, as Ashcroft et al. informed, “goes from unmasking the assumptions upon which such canonical constructions are founded, moving first to make their cryptic bases visible and then to destabilize them.”<sup>98</sup> Accordingly, the immediately following chapter focuses primarily on various means by which the analysed works expose the othering strategies.

---

<sup>98</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 176.

### 3. Establishing geographical connections: the land and the body

The land has inevitably occupied a central role in works by British Caribbean writers and immigrant writers more generally. They have been concerned with geographical crossings, which often involved not only the Caribbean and England, but also Africa, with leaving the island home for a better life in England, or on the other hand with returning home. The connection between the Caribbean and England has been established in such diverse works as Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (1985), Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956), or V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987).

Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy, too, "[a]lthough geographically situated in the West, (...) establish a direct and distinct connection with the Caribbean as they write 'home'."<sup>99</sup> The Caribbean is at the centre of many of their works. Levy's *The Long Song* or Breeze's *The Fifth Figure* take place predominantly in Jamaica. Smartt and Nichols, too, take the reader back to their homeland – Barbados and Guyana respectively. In *Small Island*, Levy tells a tale of relocation of a Jamaican couple to 1948 England. Their works, therefore, abound with some classic British immigrant writers' topics – journeying, roots, belonging and relocation.

However, as analysed in the previous chapter, in the history of subjugation of black women geographical and gender issues – the land and the body – have been very closely interlinked. This aspect is inevitably reflected in black women writers' literary discussions of geography. This chapter aims to analyse the unique connections Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy establish between the body and the land in "writing home", in (dis)connecting the Caribbean and England, in discussing here-ness and there-ness, i.e. normality and otherness. How do they write the land while writing the body? Or, in other words, how do they use the masters' tools (in order to dismantle the master's house, as Chapters 4 and 5 will analyse)?

---

<sup>99</sup> *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women 2.*



### 3.1. Territorialisation of the other body

Similarly as in works by other immigrant writers, there is a particular difference in works under scrutiny between how the Caribbean and England are described. Almost notoriously, England is depicted as a cold and hostile place, anonymous, full of false and pretentious smiles, a place where there is no room for real emotions. Accordingly, in *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* the poet complains about the weather asserting that “[f]or seven days now/ we haven’t seen/ the knight of the sun -/ No flash of golden sword/ to rescue us/ from winter’s icy castle.”<sup>100</sup> To emphasise the coldness of the country, Hortense in *Small Island* arrives to England in winter. When Gilbert wakes her up, it is still dark outside, which makes her assume that it is still night. She asks herself “[h]ow the birds wake in this country and know when to sing?” Gilbert, having spent some time in England already, informs her that in winter it is not only dark in the morning, but gets dark early too: “Most of the day dark. Sometimes if you blink you can miss the whole day.”<sup>101</sup>

This coldness does not only regard the weather, but also the country’s people. In *Small Island*, England is represented by closed door, in front of which one has to first ring the bell so as to allow the owners/ insiders to decide whether they want to let the outsider in. This is very much in contrast to the motif of “the almost permanently open door,”<sup>102</sup> used for example in Caryl Phillips’ *The Final Passage* as a symbol of the Caribbean. When Hortense eventually comes to England and rings the bell, looking forward to hear the notorious “ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling” sound, she finds out that it is broken, which symbolises the barriers first-generation migrants faced in the mother-country. In *Connecting Medium*, Smartt further analyses the face of England that is shown to its short-term visitors, when she describes England as “tourist board land/ of Beefeaters,/ cheeky chirpy cockneys/ bowler hats and butlers.”<sup>103</sup>

In *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* Nichols observes England out of the train. Scrap metal, coal and chalk, that she notices behind the window, become symbols of the coldness and anonymity of the country along with “the leafless

---

<sup>100</sup> G. Nichols, *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2010) 28.

<sup>101</sup> A. Levy, *Small Island* (Headline Publishing Group, 2004) 220.

<sup>102</sup> C. Phillips, *The Final Passage* (London: Picador, 1995) 13-14.

<sup>103</sup> *Connecting Medium* 14.

names/ of trees.”<sup>104</sup> The rhythm of the train, itself “a metallic snake,” comes to represent the rhythm of the country – regular, predictable, impersonal.

The Caribbean, on the other hand, is described as warm, welcoming, open. In *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, three poems take the reader back to Nichols’ homeland – Guyana. In the first one – “Guyana dreaming” – the landscape abounds with colours – with “[t]urquoise blue of morning/ dark of jungle night/ yellow breast of toucan/ green of parrot flight.” The following poem – “Into the Interior” – describes a bush-adventure “[t]rough dense and sweating flesh of jungle.” The bush awakens the explorers’ senses who feel “at one with the spirit of bush and river.” All three poems overflow with images of rivers, forests, valleys, whose rhythm is determined by irregular “parrot-clatter and howler-monkey song.”<sup>105</sup>

The rhythm of the Caribbean evidently very much differs from the cold predictable sound of the metal train. This is primarily because its origin is in nature. In *Startling the Flying Fish* Nichols further talks about birds producing songs, frogs bass and howler-monkeys keeping a low base.<sup>106</sup> The islands are governed by colourful music, which awakens senses, physicality and desire; music that naturally absorbs one’s whole body. Accordingly, in *Connecting Medium*, Dorothea Smartt recalls the “[t]urning swinging sixties, turning/ skareggaedubtoastingsoulblack,/ funkin for Jamaica, Barbados,/ St Kitts, Nevis, St Lucia, St. Vincent, Montserrat,/ Dominica, Antigua, Guyana, Grenada, Tobago,/ Trinidad in streets of carnival.”<sup>107</sup>

Breeze’s *The Fifth Figure* is based on the contrast of the kind of dance typical of the Caribbean and the quadrille. Here, the dance is reflective not only of geographical difference, but also of social position, or – to refer back to the notion of historical racism – of supposed evolutionary stage of the dancer. Ladies – be it English women or light-skinned women of mixed ancestry – are supposed to only dance the strict rigid four figures of the quadrille, to keep the male partner at arm’s length and to only let the music touch their toes. This is contrasted with “the dip and sway of the villagers,” the servants, who engage their hips too and let the

---

<sup>104</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 30.

<sup>105</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 23, 25.

<sup>106</sup> G. Nichols, *Startling the Flying Fish* (London: Virago Press, 2005) 37.

<sup>107</sup> *Connecting Medium* 14.

whole body dance. The importance of self-control for one's social status is obvious from the following comment by Sheba, a woman of mixed ancestry, who was sent to Mrs Hull, an Englishwoman, to be educated and become a lady:

I also make sure I do not dance like the servants though I watch them through my window when they are dancing in the yard. The music is so catching that sometimes I feel my body moving against my will, but I control myself and stop my back from bending and my hips from shaking like theirs do.<sup>108</sup>

Yet, it is the rhythm and sway of the real Caribbean dance that attracts Sheba to Curry, a black boy, and eventually in a way causes her pregnancy. The dance, reflecting the rhythm of the bush and absorbing one's whole body, becomes a marker of Curry's otherness, a characteristic that makes him so attractive to Sheba.

In accordance with what was said above, it is not only the rhythm of the island, but also nature as such, which has the power to acquire control over human bodies. As the following paragraphs illustrate, this link between the land and the body is again established in works by all four authors under scrutiny.

Primarily, this regards weather as the above discussed classic motif of works by British Caribbean writers. In Levy's *The Long Song*, Caroline Mortimer, an Englishwoman, has to protect her delicate skin from the vicious Caribbean sun. Before coming to Jamaica, she had spent her life, as Levy puts it, "in the dappled shade of an apple tree by the edge of an English lawn, where the hottest part of the day brought small beads of fragrant sweat to trespass upon her forehead." The heat from the Jamaican sun damages her body, steals her energy, makes her weak, or, as she puts it "floppy as a kitten." Instead of slowly adjusting to the weather, her condition deteriorates with years. After nine years on the island, even such activities as "[a] little embroidery or the arranging of a vase of flowers were just too much toil for her."<sup>109</sup>

It is not only the weather, but also individual aspects of nature such as the mountains or the bush, which exercise its impact on white English women's bodies. Breeze's *The Fifth Figure* begins with a story of Emma, an

---

<sup>108</sup> J. B. Breeze, *The Fifth Figure* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2006) 39.

<sup>109</sup> A. Levy, *The Long Song* (Headline Publishing Group, 2001) 27, 56.

Englishwoman, who, upon her arrival to Jamaica, meets Gobi, an illegitimate son of the plantation owner. For other Englishmen, Gobi is a “feared embarrassment”, for Emma, he is the first man in her life “who made it difficult to swallow.” She is totally taken over by his “[t]hick curly black hair and evergreen eyes/ and limbs that were made for fine clothing,/ skin slightly bronzed,”<sup>110</sup> in other words by his otherness.

When they dance, Gobi puts his hands not on her back, as it is appropriate for ladies, but on her hips. He awakens her senses, her sexuality. For Emma, Gobi represents the kind of porno-tropics of her imagination that was discussed in the previous chapter. She is unable to resist his charms and loses control over her body, which becomes governed by natural instincts. The physical and the sexual are viewed by Emma not as something inherent in her body. Instead, she believes that it is “the magic of the hills, the spirit in the bush” working their charms on all her thoughts. Eventually, she succumbs to this magic, losing her senses and rationality:

I let him touch me/ dear God, I let him in/ (...) I let the bushes rule my mind/ (...) our walks by the river/ it felt like my body wasn't mine/ (...) I let him hold me and we couldn't stop/ (...) I wanted him all and I swear it was the bushes/ oh god/ it was the bushes/ (...) I felt I was a mermaid/ and I pulled him in/ into my dark waters/ (...) / as I felt the waters burst inside me.<sup>111</sup>

Gobi is accused of rape and murdered in the bush; his white step-brother smashes his head with a machete. Emma never reveals the truth. It is Gobi – the other – who is blamed for what happened and suffers the consequences in the form of a death sentence from the hands of his racial superior. The following explanation of Emma's reflects the prevalent perception by the colonisers of the natives as always sexually desirous of white people, as discussed in the previous chapter: “Rape, they said, Rape/ that was the jurisdiction/ (...) / Rape/ freedom couldn't change the verdict/ he was black and I was white/ nothing had changed really.”<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 9.

<sup>111</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 11, 14.

<sup>112</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 14.

After this incident, it is the fear of the bush that makes Emma lose her rationality. Now the bush represents black magic to her and equals blood – both the blood from Gobi’s smashed head as well as the blood from delivery of Gobi’s daughter Susan. Emma sees her daughter as “born of bush” and therefore does not consider her to be her own. She is afraid that the bushes, which surround the house, can come nearer and claim the child its own. She keeps guard, believing that it will not move if her mind is strong. She also keeps a machete so that she can chop it away. In contrast to its previous workings, the bush now paralyses her body, makes her sit at the window and observe it all day and night.

For Emma, the most important sign of connection between the bush and the child is the child’s hair – tangly as the bush. Hair, Smartt in *Connecting Medium* claims, “is an integral part of your skin.”<sup>113</sup> The human other – its body – is again described in the same way as the geographical other. It is almost as if the land and the person – here the bush and Emma’s daughter Susan – were one entity.

Hair plays a very important role in works by black women writers more generally. Firstly, it takes over the role of skin colour as an outward manifestation of otherness. (Although this does not mean that skin colour is not referred to as well.) Secondly, and more importantly, however, its symbolic quality is even stronger, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

What regards hair as a manifestation of otherness, in “twists and turns” in *Connecting Medium*, Dorothea Smartt lists facts about black women’s hair. The first and the most important one is that “Fact: There is good hair, and there is bad hair.”<sup>114</sup> “Bad hair” has the power to provoke racism, marginalisation, cause exclusion, or affect one’s social position within societies, where one’s ancestry matters. This is because it reveals one’s origin, or, as Smartt puts it makes clear “that we have coolie in the family.”<sup>115</sup> At school, Susan is being laughed at because of her hair. Other girls, whose hair is long and straight, threaten to shave her and relieve her of that hair.<sup>116</sup> “Bad hair” represents a historical burden. It also represents lack of self-control, which is emphasised by tales of women whose children’s hair are rough because they could not resist their fathers’ physical

---

<sup>113</sup> *Connecting Medium* 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Connecting Medium* 23.

<sup>115</sup> *Connecting Medium* 23.

<sup>116</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 19.

charms: “He steal yuh mother heart/ And send her home with child/ That`s why yuh hair so rough girl/ That`s why yuh skin so dark.”<sup>117</sup>

In Smartt`s poem “clueless”, “good hair”, on the other hand, is described as “straight/ no twists or crosses/ a wiped clean page/ it doesn`t read./ Curled out/ no markers to ancestry.”<sup>118</sup> Good hair is so iconic that in some works it even signifies markers of holiness. In *Small Island*, for example, Hortense describes Mrs Ryder, the whitest woman she has ever seen, asserting that “[h]er short blonde hair sat stiff as a halo around her head.”<sup>119</sup>

In Breeze`s *The Fifth Figure*, “good hair” opens doors and the world of possibilities. Susan`s daughter Amanda is popular among children because they love brushing her long and straight hair. She also receives all attention from boys at school. Susan considers her a blessing and sends her to school, to be educated. Her “good hair” enables her to succeed because she can basically “pass anywhere for white.”<sup>120</sup> Other children, whose hair is tangly and skin darker, have to take care of the house, plant vegetables, sell them on the market. Good hair equals privileged position. The straighter and blonder the better, as also Amanda is aware of, fascinated by the blond hair of the Germans.

In *Connecting Medium*, Smartt emphasises the effort black women invest in changing their hair, in erasing their markers to ancestry and geographical background, in being clueless: “Fact: A chemical used to straighten African hair is called ‘lye’. (...) Fact: Black women spend a major part of their income fixing their hair.” She portrays the black woman “[p]laited and stocking-capped,/ beside her head/ the pungent edge of frying hair, smoked brown-paper twists/ greased and combed. Prevention is better than cure.”<sup>121</sup> Works by Levy and Nichols, too, abound with images of women having their hair combed, washed, oiled, braided. In this regard, hair is again a more powerful symbol since, as Smartt noted, “what you put on your hair you wouldn`t dream of putting on your face, your skin.”<sup>122</sup>

Because of the close connection between the hair and the bush, the latter, too, affects lives of black women/ women of mixed ancestry (i.e. women with bad

---

<sup>117</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 47.

<sup>118</sup> *Connecting Medium* 22.

<sup>119</sup> *Small Island* 45.

<sup>120</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 26.

<sup>121</sup> *Connecting Medium* 22, 23.

<sup>122</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, “Who`s Looking at Who(m)? Re-Viewing Medusa” in *Sucking Salt* 112.

hair) and their ability to control their destiny. It empowers black men, who then exercise this control over them. Susan, similarly as her mother Emma, cannot resist Woody. In the following paragraph, she explains her reasons:

[T]he bush had given him a perfume that overtook my senses and for the first time in my life made me scared of the power of a man. Never had I felt so weak and in need of someone`s touch. (...) I really fell over into his arms and when he caught me I was ready to be taken.<sup>123</sup>

For further generations of women in their family, the bush becomes a place where the body loses control and the following advice comes to be the central message of the mother to the daughter: “Whatever you do, stay away from the bush, remember you have your own bedroom.”<sup>124</sup> In comparison to the above impact of the bush on white women, in case of black women the motif of the bush evidently involves both the gender and colonial aspects of their subordination.

### 3.2. Territorialisation of the female body

Though used by all four authors under scrutiny, territorialisation of the female body is most apparent in Grace Nichols` *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*. Dora Maar, the object of Picasso`s painting, considers the artist to be at the same time her conquistador and her Cortez as well as her bull, her stallion. She asks him to invade her – his New World, his Malinche<sup>125</sup> – with the sperm of his colours. Through the invasion, Picasso acquires complete control over her and she transforms “from lioness to goddess/ from goddess to doormat/ from eagle, raven, swan/ into a silly duck/ flapping about all day/ in case he calls./ In case he needs me to sit still.” Not only Dora Maar loses control over her body, she loses her body as such, which is illustrated by Picasso`s treatment of her face: “Each time my own face cracks/ he rushes to pick up the pieces/ with pencil and pad -/ storing each fragment/ each briny drop already pearled/ for some future need.”<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> *The Long Song* 22.

<sup>124</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 49.

<sup>125</sup> As Nichols explains in the glossary, Malinche was an Amerindian woman, the translator for Hernan Cortes during the Spanish Conquest of 1521. She bore him a son who is seen symbolically as the first mestizo.

<sup>126</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 11, 19.

Dora Maar notes that “[e]verything he touches/ with his Midas-hands/ turns, of course, into fortune.” She, too, thereby turns into a fortune, “sold by Sotheby -/ ninety-five million under the hammer!” As she notes, she would have never believed that she could be so famous. She, however, will always be viewed as Picasso’s painting, not a painting of Dora Maar, an individual, a woman who was painted to be remembered for “fruits of her own life.” Moreover, the picture, as she sees it, is a deformed image of hers. Her mouth is twisted, her teeth gnashed, her fingers fat and clumsy. The cruelty of Picasso’s invasion is illustrated by the assumption that “instead of a brush/ he used a knife on me -/ a savage geometry.”<sup>127</sup> She becomes a virgin territory that Picasso can claim his own – even though it had existed before – and change it based on his own needs – in this case using his cubistic method of painting.

Dora Maar’s picture, depicting her private grief, her tears, is on display in Tate Gallery. Speaking from the picture, she is subject to the visitor’s examination. Most of them pity her, especially children. Her body thereby represents a public territory in which no private areas are allowed. This is represented by her very intimate issues such as menstrual cycle being public. There is a red carpet behind her on the picture: “Month after month/ I’ve spread the red womb-carpet.” As was the case of Emma in *The Fifth Figure*, blood is often referenced in connection with the land. This is very much apparent from Dora’s longing for a child: “Month after month/ the little one I crave/ Disappears like a flood/ into the forest/ Prefers to stay hidden among the branches/ than come into the limelight of living.”<sup>128</sup>

To return briefly to the territorialisation of the other body, analysed in the previous section, in *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, Picasso is not only pictured as painting the portrait of the woman and her cat (Dora Maar Au Chat), but also again of the other, the exotic. Nichols’ poem “Guyana Dreaming” is dedicated to Aubrey Williams, Guyanese foremost artist, who, as we find out in the footnote, came to Europe in the early 1950s and during his visit to Paris was introduced to Picasso. Based on the real event, Nichols retells the story in her poem:

Your striking African-Mayan face/ that captured Picasso, old world  
maestro,/ whose first words by way of introduction were: “You

<sup>127</sup> *Picasso I Want My Face Back* 9,11, 12.

<sup>128</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 14.



have a fine head. You must pose for me.”// But you wanted a dialogue,/ not a sitting between master and exotic./ So you moved out of his eyes` hypnotic orbit, his well-known fascination with African masks.<sup>129</sup>

As was territorialisation of the other body, the image of the female body as a public property in which no private areas are allowed, i.e. the territorialisation of the female body, is very prominent in other works by Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy.

Territorialisation in terms of the body being a public object begins with bodies subjected to gaze, humiliation and evaluation by men/ the coloniser. This, again, is in line with what was said above, Sartje Baartman being the most notorious example. In *The Long Song*, for example, Caroline Mortimer looks upon the tall Kitty, staring, as she describes it, “into the deep nostrils of her broad, flat nose, around her thick lips and past her sturdy ample shoulders.” To show her Kitty`s strong legs, Caroline`s brother John Howarth pulls up Kitty`s skirt. Caroline`s question “Is it a woman?”<sup>130</sup> completely objectifies and defeminises Kitty.

In accordance with the notion of the colossal black woman, her daughter July – brought up by Caroline Mortimer - views Kitty as “the mighty black woman.” In the following paragraph, July describes the fantasy of her birth, whereby her mother does not even notice that she has just given birth to a child:

[S]he beheld – wrestling a long spike of cane, swinging it in the air and slicing at its length and leaves before hurling the stripped pole away – the mighty black woman that was her mother. Her mother`s arms, flexing under this strenuous work, were as robust as the legs of a horse in full gallop. Her thick neck looked to be crafted from some cleverly worked wood. Her bare breast, running with rain and sweat, glistened as if lacquered. This colossal woman was still determined upon her work, unaware that she had mislaid anything.<sup>131</sup>

Similarly as Dora Maar is a product of Picasso`s artistic talent, Kitty is a product of John Howarth`s plantation skills. When Caroline admires Kitty`s

---

<sup>129</sup> Picasso, *I Want My Face Back* 23-24.

<sup>130</sup> *The Long Song* 41.

<sup>131</sup> *The Long Song* 13.

strong legs, her brother explains to her that “when she was first purchased she was called Little Kitty;” he got her cheap because she was not expected to live. Her present condition in his view testifies to the fact that he “is the best planter in the whole of the Caribbean.” Caroline Mortimer, similarly as her brother, later exercises her breeding skills on Kitty’s daughter July whom she decides to civilise by making a lady’s maid of her: “sure as a turkey seized for the Christmas table, July had been raised, caught and stuffed for the task.”<sup>132</sup>

The act of renaming as central to ownership of the female body is central to Levy’s story as well as to works by other women writers of Caribbean origin. In Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, the main heroine Antoinette is renamed Bertha by her English husband (similarly as her landscape was renamed). According to Jamaica Kincaid, renaming is a metaphor for conquest and colonial domination.<sup>133</sup> It therefore refers back to the discussion of the colonisers renaming their new places of conquest and thereby virginising them.

The territorialised black female body, bought and bred for the purposes of the coloniser, is subjected to invasions in the form of enforced sexual acts and rapes. As a way of introduction to *The Long Song*, the narrator describes what some readers may consider “too indelicate a commencement of any tale.”<sup>134</sup> In the first paragraph of the novel, Kitty tells the story of her being raped by Tom Dewar, the overseer. The description is rather technical, as if the body even did not belong to her. This conscious detachment from her own body represents for Kitty her only instrument of agency, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. On the following pages of the novel the reader learns that Kitty is raped regularly and that her seeming complicity with this act stems from her desire to avoid punishment in the form of the lash from the overseer’s whip.

Since slave women primarily represented units of production of further manpower, deliveries of children, too, become public issues subjected to the coloniser’s gaze. In *The Long Song*, for example, Levy provides a detailed description of Kitty giving birth to July. Her extreme suffering is communicated to the reader by her screaming: “Me must be dead, Miss Rose (...) Me must be

---

<sup>132</sup> *The Long Song* 42, 69.

<sup>133</sup> “Jamaica Kincaid,” *Caribbean Writer: The Literary Gem of the Caribbean*, 17 December 2013 <[http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=612&catid=13:volume10&Itemid=2](http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=612&catid=13:volume10&Itemid=2)>.

<sup>134</sup> *The Long Song* 7.

dead!”<sup>135</sup> Instead of feeling sympathy, the overseer Tom Dewar, who is also the father of the child, is annoyed by the noise and finds it unbearable. In order to silence Kitty, he orders Rose to stuff up her mouth with rags. When she refuses to do it, he does it himself, very brutally, physically abuses Kitty while she is lying there naked, as vulnerable as she can be. In accordance with this objectification and mechanisation of the female body, taking children from female slaves is perceived as desirable since, as John Howart asserts, it encourages them to have another.

Other big and strong black women lose their agency and are taken in possession of men, be they white or black, coloniser or colonised. Describing her first sexual contact with Woody, Susan says that she, “a big strong woman” cried like a baby when Woody “filled (...) [her] completely and covered (...) [her] in himself like (...) [she] was dainty and fragile.”<sup>136</sup> This feeling of being possessed becomes almost an addiction to her. Sexual intercourse is often described in terms of the female body being subject to geographic conquest and expansion<sup>137</sup> and invaded by the sperm, as was the case of Nichols’ Dora Maar. The very voluntariness of such an act is thereby challenged. In *The Fifth Figure*, for example, this aspect is emphasised by the location where the intercourse mostly takes place – the bush, whose capacity to empower black men and deprive women of control over their bodies was described above. Such territorialised sexual intercourse often results in unplanned pregnancies whereby the father of the child leaves without carrying any consequences.

These sexual encounters are evidently primarily affected by geographical issues, most dominantly in terms of colonial hierarchy. This, as discussed above, regards both types of the colonial fantasy – both types of fascination by the other. On one hand, there is Emma’s obsession with her colonial fantasy Gobi, or Curry’s attractiveness to Sheba. On the other hand, there is Amanda, Susan’s youngest daughter, who is obsessed with an idea of her white Solomon. She eventually finds Max, whose white and blond hair fascinate her. She, too, however, ends up having sex with him in the bush – in a bed made of leaves of wild turmeric, their sexual intercourse being described as more of a territorial

---

<sup>135</sup> *The Long Song* 16.

<sup>136</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 22.

<sup>137</sup> *Demonic Grounds* 45.

invasion. As Amanda reports, she stumbled over a rock, fell into his arms and gave herself to him “wild and like a river flowing through rock.”<sup>138</sup> Amanda, too, gets pregnant, while Max marries his equal – a German girl from his village.

While black women`s geographical origin often makes them desirable sexual partners, in the context of long-term official relationships its effect is quite the opposite. In *The Long Song*, Robert Goodwin – an Englishman – sustains sexual relationship with July, but marries Caroline Mortimer instead, because that is what his parents in England and in fact the whole colonial society expect him to do. In *Small Island* then, Michael is fascinated by the shape of her body and constantly flirts with her. However, after returning from his studies in England, instead of marrying Hortense, he falls in love with Mrs. Ryder, a married Englishwoman of the most delicate light skin and blond hair.

The last woman in Breeze`s *The Fifth Figure* is sent to live with an English family in order to be educated, but instead is molested by the father of the family – her teacher, for whom she, too, is a colonial fantasy, the exotic territory, which can be invaded without any consequences. It is again Amanda who is to blame for being such sexual allure for a decent married trustworthy Englishman. She does not even tell her parents since, she is convinced, they would not believe her anyway.

### **3.3. Territorialisation of gender restrictions**

This notion of the other as an exotic and attractive territory for short-term stays is also an often discussed topic. In the twenty-first-century works by Nichols, Breze, Smartt and Levy, this analysis is conducted primarily by means of focus on tourism. For European and American tourists, the islands represent “palm-tree seductions.” The tourists come here uninformed, not needing to know the effects of colonialism on the islands: “No need to know that sea/ does not always keep up/ this front of blue serenity.” They can freely soak in sunshine and the sea, enjoy the islands` beautiful nature, their sensuality and sexual allure. As

---

<sup>138</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 34.

one of the female tourist's husband tells her, "[h]ere with the wide sea, darling,/ you can be a dolphin/ or newly washed Aphrodite."<sup>139</sup>

While for the tourists – “the colonisers” – the islands represent a means of leaving behind the restrictions of their daily lives in England, for West Indians the situation is quite the opposite. In many works by British Caribbean writers, West Indians perceive the Caribbean as a small world (as also the title *Small Island* makes clear) where there is “[n]ot enough space to grow or do things,”<sup>140</sup> as one of Caryl Phillips' characters suggests. As Susheila Nasta claims, the colonial education “had repeatedly told them that ‘real’ places were ‘cold’ places and these were elsewhere.”<sup>141</sup> The islands equal restrictions, while England is seen as opening new horizons and possibilities.

In *Startling the Flying Fish*, Grace Nichols, too, focuses on the West Indians' hopes of leaving the Caribbean. One of her characters wishes to leave the islands as she believes it to be an “underworld/ that would crown (...) [her] Queen of Poverty.”<sup>142</sup> In *Connecting Medium*, the poet also elaborates on the perception of the Caribbean as a land where one's future is pre-determined by the islands' history of colonisation where one is “masterpattern,/ styled, cut, ready-to-wear suit/ of canes, molasses.”<sup>143</sup>

In works by black women writers, however, these restrictions are not only defined by their racial otherness, but equally by their gender, as the above discussed case of “framed” Dora Maar made clear. In *The Long Song*, while Michael leaves to study in England, Hortense is bound to stay on the island, as the boy also mockingly tells her: “I will learn about the whole world, Hortense. And you will be staying at the penny-a-week school, skipping silly rhymes and counting frogs at the base of the tree.”<sup>144</sup> For women in *The Fifth Figure*, too, biology is destiny and they are confined to their island homes bringing up children of men who travel and live their carefree lives.

---

<sup>139</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 18, 17.

<sup>140</sup> *The Final Passage* 103.

<sup>141</sup> S. Nasta, “Setting Up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels,” *Other Britain, Other British*, ed. A. R. Lee (East Haven, Conn: Pluto Press, 1995) 51.

<sup>142</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 5.

<sup>143</sup> *Connecting Medium* 12.

<sup>144</sup> *Small Island* 42.

In line with the above discussed link between the land and the body, gender restrictions, too, are described through landscape and territory metaphors. In *Connecting Medium*, Smartt primarily employs the image of the cane to evoke black women's rootedness. In *The Fifth Figure*, Emma, as described above, was paralysed by the bush. In *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, Nichol's Dora Maar, describes her imprisonment in the painting by describing the kind of colours Picasso used. These colours, as the following paragraph shows, are contrasted with those of nature and landscape:

Green knows me -/ Not the green of new shoots/ but the ghastly green of gangrene./ Yellow knows me -/ Not the cheery yellow of the sun/ but the sickly hues. Of this war's putrefaction./ Blue knows me -/ Not the boundless blues of sky or sea/ but the blues of the singer's/ deepest sorrow.<sup>145</sup>

### **3.4. Mother-daughter knot, or territorialisation of female bonds**

As indicated above, geography exercises immense impact on relationships, as the cases of Emma and Gobi, Susan and Woody, or Amanda and Max illustrate. In other cases, relationships are broken, disallowed, or quite on the contrary. In other words, in works by Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy geographical contexts bind and separate.

Among the most frequently discussed relationships in works by black women writers around the world undoubtedly is the mother-daughter bond. It is, for example, established as a key motif in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *Lucy*. According to Victoria Burrows, mother-daughter knots are always entangled by its relationships not only to patriarchal domination, but also to racial domination and exploitation. As such, they can never be separated not only from their historicity, but also from their territoriality.<sup>146</sup> They thereby become a powerful symbol and enable black women writers to establish a "correlation between the political difficulties afflicting the island-‘mother’ country relationship and the problems affecting the mother-daughter family

---

<sup>145</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 9.

<sup>146</sup> *Whiteness and Trauma* 9.

relationship.”<sup>147</sup> The above discussed restrictions, too, play a key role in this metaphoric use of the female bond.

Inevitably, therefore, at the centre of literary attention are tensions, ruptures in the relationships, motherlessness, which evoke extreme anxiety that appears as cultural and psychic alienation and dislocation. These all in one way or other become metaphors “for the alienation of the daughter-island from the mother-country.”<sup>148</sup>

In *Small Island* Levy creates a character – Hortense – who feels estranged from her own mother to the extent that she rather chooses to be motherless, filling the empty space with an idealised image of an absent white father. Hortense grew to look as her father did; her complexion is as light as his. She knows that with such a countenance there is a chance of a golden life for her. She wishes to be given to her father’s cousins for upbringing, because, as she explains, she could not only learn to read and write, but also become a lady worthy of her father, “wherever he might be.”

As it is clear from the way she talks about her – “I was born to a woman called Alberta” – she only merits her mother for giving life to her. She remembers “a skirt flapping in the breeze and bare black feet skipping over stones” but not the colour of her mother’s eyes, the shape of her lips or the feel of her skin. The only things she recalls – clothes and shoeless feet – represent her mother’s low social status. As Hortense further explained, “Alberta was a country girl who could neither read nor write nor perform even the rudiment of her times tables.” Most importantly, however, Alberta’s skin colour was that of “the bitter chocolate hue.”<sup>149</sup> As Hortense sees it, this ultimately restricts her mother’s value for her. She cannot give her anything. Unlike her father, her mother represents the small world, restrictions and confinements.

Breeze’s *The Fifth Figure* delineates a whole genealogy of broken or damaged mother-daughter bonds. The first one has already been mentioned above. Emma the Englishwoman abandons her daughter Susan, who, as she believes, was “born of bush.” Emma refuses to take her child and feed it; instead, she advises Nana to take it away and give it to the bushes: “[T]he bush will claim its own (...)

---

<sup>147</sup> *Motherlands* 260-261.

<sup>148</sup> *Motherlands* 260-261, 280.

<sup>149</sup> *The Long Song* 37, 38.

give it bush tea/ (...)/ it's not mine/ it came in from the bushes it's not mine feed it from the bushes (...)"<sup>150</sup>

Susan and Amanda, her youngest and whitest daughter, also experience tensions in their relationship. These are very much determined by their differing positions within the racially hierarchical society. As opposed to Susan, Amanda is weak and naïve. She believes that her mother does not need her since she is very strong. Instead, she devotes all her love and care to her father Woody, crippled after falling off a horse: "I have already decided that, however long he lives, I will look after my father. My mother, Susu, seems so strong, I don't think she will need me."<sup>151</sup> Amanda blames her mother for not being kind enough to him. When her mother explains to her that he used to physically abuse her, Amanda hates her for telling her the truth and thereby destroying the image of her father, to whom she has always felt so close.

The mother-daughter separation is often caused by a prospect of a better life. This reason ranges from the child being sent to a racially advantaged family, or to England. Amanda, for example, sends her daughter Sheba to Mrs Hull's house at the age of six. There she is to be educated and become a lady. When Mrs Hull leaves for England, however, Sheba has to return to her "old mommy." Her return means a rapid fall in terms of her social position and everyday comfort. The old mommy, in contrast to Mrs Hull, represents again the world of limited options.

In Levy's *The Long Song*, July is taken from her mother Kitty by Caroline Mortimer, the Englishwoman, who finds her "adorable". She is fascinated by "her tiny black fingers" and perceives her as an exotic toy: "[I]f her skin was not as dark as boot blacking, why she favoured one of Caroline's childhood dolls!" Kitty, naturally, is very much affected by this rupture. She secretly comes to the great house every day to watch her girl through the window. Nevertheless, she, too, tries to comfort herself by the prospects and chances that this relocation can bring to July. In Caroline Mortimer's care, July transforms from "being a filthy nigger child – used only to working in the fields – into the missus's favoured lady's maid." In her new life, she, too, seems to give preference to the ancestral

---

<sup>150</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 15.

<sup>151</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 35.



line of her white – though absent – father, about whom she constantly boasts. Eventually she grows up into a young lady “with crafty black eyes, a skinny nose, and narrow lips that often bore a smile of insolence”<sup>152</sup> Her racially stigmatised origin is thus to a certain extent eradicated.

Later in her life, July, too gives birth to a daughter, whose father is Robert Godwin, Caroline Mortimer’s husband. When leaving for England, Caroline steals the child and July never sees her daughter again.

Throughout the works, surrogate mothers, too, play an important role in black women’s lives. Susan, rejected by her own mother Emma, is cared for by Nana, her “real mother.” Sheba, too, perceives Mrs Hull as her “new mommy.” The last woman in the genealogy is then brought up by her grandmother Sheba. The family link, however, is again broken, since the child’s hair is different as her father was black “[I]ike he come over here from Guinea.” The grandmother keeps brushing and oiling the child’s hair to establish the link, though unsuccessfully:

So sit still now with Granny/ She will try to comb yuh hair/ Though  
it rough and tangle easy/ Don’t cry when she use the comb/ Sing  
girl, sing child,/ Or the comb will break in two/ If yuh pull away  
the plaits/ While we combing it for you/ Four long plaits we  
making/ Hanging down yuh back/ Thick, thick plaits of rough  
black hair/ And the oil to shine it right/ The oil to make it comb  
easy.<sup>153</sup>

While representing the confines and restrictions of the colonised country, the mothers often at the same time represent the past, from which the daughters want to break. As Kincaid’s Lucy asserted: “My past is my mother.”<sup>154</sup> This issue will further be discussed in the following chapter, which focuses more on the aspect of history.

### 3.5. Chapter Summary

As the above analysis suggests, black women writers establish so close a link between the land and the body that the two “entities” often seem to merge into one. This regards both racial othering – as for example the case of Gobi and

---

<sup>152</sup> *The Long Song* 40, 58.

<sup>153</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 23, 48.

<sup>154</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990) 90.

the bush illustrated – as well as gender othering – as shown primarily by Dora Maar. The other body – be it female or colonised – is exposed as a territory, a surface, which has historically been available to public gaze and objectification. In the context of what was said above, in case of the black female body, these two lines of territorialisation clash and mutually intensify. Accordingly, black women writers expose the black body as it was rendered by history of colonialism – excessive and grotesque, eroticised, available for male conquest.

In line with the notion of strategic essentialism, territorialisation of the female body becomes a conscious strategy, employed to dissect the whole concept and deconstruct it. In order to defeat the enemy ideology, it first has to be known. It is with their corporeality and visibility that black women were attacked. These aspects of their identity – exposed to the reader – are now used as a means to fight back against the hegemonic discourses and reclaim black woman`s (sexual) subjectivity. In other words, works under scrutiny use the master`s tools to dismantle the house and make both the body and the territory speak out, as the following chapters analyse.

#### 4. Drawing temporal linkages: the past and the body

To reconstruct the past few hundred years of black presence in the British Empire has been a prominent concern of Caribbean immigrants to Britain throughout the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>155</sup> Focus was primarily put on slavery – the very basis of the ideological formation of modern racism. The existing records were largely filtered through a white understanding and adjusted to serve a dominant white narrative.<sup>156</sup> Novels on slavery became a means of finding a place for the histories of black people official records exclude<sup>157</sup> and thereby a key to understanding and explaining the present. The urge to reclaim, to look back, extends far beyond British-Caribbean diaspora, as also Salman Rushdie's famous essay "Imaginary Homelands" shows.

As the previous paragraph made clear, documents where black slaves speak of and for themselves are largely missing.<sup>158</sup> The few of the existing slave narratives, moreover, were written by men. Black women's voices were therefore ultimately muted. Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy, too, focus on reconstruction of history. Levy's *The Long Song* takes the reader back to late nineteenth-century Jamaica – to the last years of slavery and the early years of freedom that followed. Smartt's *Ship Shape* excavates the missing history of Samboo – an African who, enslaved at the age of around eight, was brought to Lancaster in eighteenth century by the captain of a slave ship as a present for his wife. He died soon after his arrival in 18<sup>th</sup> and was buried at Sunderland Point. Breeze's *The Fifth Figure*, too, goes back to the late nineteenth century. Memory, however, is a prominent topic in their other works, too.

As was the case of geographical issues, history reconstruction, too, is inevitably determined by the complex position black women have occupied. This chapter therefore aims to examine the specific ways Smartt, Levy, Nichols and Breeze employ to reconstruct history, which subjected them to such practices as outlined in Chapter 2. Not surprisingly, the central role again is played by the body. How do black women writers employ the body to reclaim the past, or, as it

---

<sup>155</sup> See for example Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge*, David Dabydeen's *Turner* and *Slave Song*.

<sup>156</sup> *The Long Song* 410.

<sup>157</sup> *Ghosts of Slavery* xii.

<sup>158</sup> *The Long Song* 410.

to look at it from a different perspective, how do they employ the past to reclaim the body?

#### 4.1. Reading history for clues, not for facts: history versus memory<sup>159</sup>

Serious doubts have been cast upon the possibility of written history being true and objective. The major lines of critique are discussed for example in C. Behan McCullagh's *The Truth of History* (1997). Most famously, this issue was at the centre of attention of Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973). White introduces various theoreticians who have challenged the history's claim to a place among the sciences as well as its status as a genuine art. These two lines of inquiry, White concludes, show that it is possible to view history as a little more than a specifically Western prejudice by which Western civilisation views its relationship to other cultures and civilisations and retroactively substantiates the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society. Hayden White himself considered historical work as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them."<sup>160</sup>

Such explanation is inevitably bound up with the subjectivity and interpretive systems of historians.<sup>161</sup> It is the historians who interpret historical evidence, give shape to the past events, and pattern them. As Said noted, "history is made by men and women, (...) always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated."<sup>162</sup> In this regard, history, too, represents a form of the business of knowing as it was discussed in the introduction. Moreover, it reduces the complexity of the past by putting it into a chronological order and patterning it. Most importantly, mainstream historiography inevitably approaches the past from a dominant position.

To black women, the dominant historiography has been particularly cruel. Primarily, as it was noted above, black women's voices were ultimately muted both by racial and gender hegemonies. Where white male historians left some

---

<sup>159</sup> Alice Walker in *Connecting Medium* 22

<sup>160</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 2.

<sup>161</sup> H. Wylie, *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) 17.

<sup>162</sup> *Orientalism* xiv.

space for minorities and colonised nations, this space, again, was almost exclusively male, as for example the slave narratives illustrate. Black women's participation in the dominant narrative was restricted to the role of the object. This, as Chapter 2 illustrated, involved sexualisation, territorialisation of their bodies, and othering. Such constructions were to justify and support colonial and sexual advances and practises of white men. To again refer back to Chapter 2, black women were also left out from the movements and discourses, which struggled against the two dominant ideologies – from postcolonial theory and feminism, which were themselves governed by hegemonies of various kinds.

Works by Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy very much focus on the subjective aspect of historiography. In *Ship Shape*, Smartt dismisses history books as “erudite manuscripts/ that aid and abet/ corroborate and validate each other,” as “half-truths covering reality.” Moreover, she sees history as fog over certain peoples' stories, to whom denial is of tragic consequences: “great tomes that weigh/ over our living, African diasporic selves.”<sup>163</sup> In *Startling the Flying Fish* Nichols, too, talks about “the weight of history-/ history with its dates and treaties/ history with its goodies and baddies.”<sup>164</sup>

One such story – suppressed to the advantage of the coloniser – is that of an unknown African who died shortly after his arrival at Sunderland Point on the Lune River estuary of Morecambe Bay. In the local folklore – *Lonsdale Magazine* from 1882 – he is remembered simply as Samboo. As Smartt makes clear in her poem “untitled”, he was to remain “no-one” – a mere nameless object: “He has no name but Samboo,/ filled with your pity and remorse./ I wonder if this grave is empty;/ because he's no-one, Lancaster can name/ him for its past, not his people's bury him under its myths.”<sup>165</sup> In 1736, when he arrived, Lancaster was becoming the fourth largest slave port in Britain. The fog over Samboo's story was to sustain its economic and political growth. As long as he remained a nameless non-human “it”, slave trade could be presented as mere buying and selling of goods from the so-called “West-Indies trade”; those involved in it could view themselves as “grocers”.

---

<sup>163</sup> *Ship Shape* 11.

<sup>164</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 26.

<sup>165</sup> *Ship Shape* 19.

In *Ship Shape* Smartt aims to “vilify” dominant history with her mother’s “knowing/ sayings.” This imaginary mother – also referred to as Black Mother or Blackwoman – “peers at scanty facts/ and barely sees anyone she could call family-.” She therefore decides to replace them with memories greater than her own. When encouraging her readers to pay attention, Smartt asks them to “listen beyond the shallows,/ there’s wisdom to be learned through/ fleeting words, instinctive dreams, Olokun stirring,/ sending dark bubbles from her depths/ that are no more than air on the breeze.” History, where such stories as that of Sambo are missing, is to be replaced by memory – knowledge of the Black mother, “memories greater than her own.”<sup>166</sup>

The Black Mother’s story, as also Smartt’s use of vocabulary – “dreams”, “bubbles”, or “breeze” – makes clear, is not an accurate reconstruction of the past in a sense that mainstream history pretends to be. To some extent, this is of course inevitable because of the lack of historical resources. As noted above, very little unbiased writing or testimony is available. Where the archives and contemporaneous books failed to provide information, the re-constructors, therefore, inevitably had to recourse to imagination.

However, as Toni Morrison emphasised, just because the slaves’ world has to be imagined, its representation is not any less true. Accordingly, she calls her imaginative recreation of the past an archaeology – digging and piecing together a world that exists only as fragments in the archives.<sup>167</sup> Erna Brodber, too, saw the imagination of the creative writers – those who feel the pain of history-less-ness – as a rightful source of admissible data on the behaviour of people who left no memoirs.<sup>168</sup> By acknowledging imagination as a history material, Morrison and Brodber further blur the traditional distinction between history and literature that has been reconfigured in contemporary theory.<sup>169</sup>

While on one hand veracity is not achievable, on the other hand it is not even the goal of black women’s writing. According to Jenny Sharpe, the re-constructed story/ memory, unlike history, does not have to be faithful to the past.

---

<sup>166</sup> *Ship Shape* 11.

<sup>167</sup> T. Morrison, “The Site of Memory” in *Ghosts of Slavery* xi.

<sup>168</sup> “Oral Sources and the Creation of a Social History of the Caribbean” 7.

<sup>169</sup> *Speculative Fictions* 24.

This is because its aim is to heal, to make sense of the present and produce a solid ground for the present and the future. As Jenny Sharpe explained,

[h]istory matters to all of these writers because they consider a slave past to be intimately bound up with the present, as point of departure for the African diaspora or a condition of existence for fractured identities. Slavery may be a thing of the past but that does not mean that its legacy is not still with us.<sup>170</sup>

Novels on slavery and other traumatic periods in the history of black women can therefore be considered at least as reflective of the present as they are of the past, most importantly because of the way in which meaning is made of the past. Black women writers who re-tell forgotten past of their female ancestors inevitably involve their present concerns, worries, and needs.

While history has been the great tomes that provide self-proclaimed facts *about* people, memory speaks *of* and *for* the people. History, Wall noted, documented slavery as an institution, not as the experience generations of people lived.<sup>171</sup> Moreover, this documentation was conducted from the outside. Black women writers want to re-tell the things that are missing in our history-books, or, as Nichols puts it, lift the fog of the centuries.<sup>172</sup> Levy, explaining her motivations behind writing *The Long Song*, said that she “wanted to put back in the voices of everyday life for black Jamaicans that are so silent in the record. (...) [She] was trying to breathe back the life of ordinary people into the skeleton of recorded events.” She further specifies that she wanted to focus on “the chatter and clatter of people building their lives, families and communities, ducking, diving and conducting the businesses of life in appallingly difficult circumstances.”<sup>173</sup> In other words, she wanted to focus on everyday life situations in lives of common people.

In such situations the deepest truths emerge more clearly and luminously. The emphasis on spirit over historical precision was emphasised for example by Lukács, who noted that the “‘cult of facts’ is a miserable surrogate for this intimacy with the people’s historical life.” This achievement, which makes the

---

<sup>170</sup> *Ghosts of Slavery* xii.

<sup>171</sup> *Worrying the Line* 20.

<sup>172</sup> Grace Nichols, *Startling the Flying Fish* 26.

<sup>173</sup> *The Long Song* 414, 410.

past accounts in his eyes so true, is seen as due in part to the freedom with which writers of realistic fiction, including the historical fiction, handle their material.<sup>174</sup>

Putting back the voices that were left out primarily involves individualisation of the experience of slavery and other traumatic events, whose subjects were largely documented as mere anonymous masses. Memory brings slaves to life, gives them names, families, human character traits and personal needs. Smartt's anonymous African, known as mere "Samboo", is re-named Bilal. Although in a little bit different context, in *Picasso I Want My Face Back*, Nichols, too, wanted to give a voice to the face with haggard fractures features. Naming, however, represents only the beginning of the whole process of giving voice to those who had been silenced. Their missing stories have to be told, their false imposed identity has to be seen through. The wholeness has to be envisioned out of the fragments.<sup>175</sup>

According to Patricia Hill Collins, focus on personal issues is characteristic of black women writers' writing, also in comparison with their male counterparts. Collins asserts that while black men mostly focus on interracial conflicts, these do not take centre stage in black women's writing. Contemporary black women writers "focus instead on those intimate relationships in which the most painful consequences of racism are played out. Racism corrodes love between black men and women, fractures families, and destroys mothers' dreams for their children."<sup>176</sup>

This personalisation of slavery and oppression has, to some extent, been already analysed above. Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy tell various tales of relationships – between a man and a woman, two women, or a mother and a daughter – which are affected by racial and gender hierarchies. In their works, however, these individual stories and traumatic experiences affecting personal relationships are universalised and speak of generations of black people around the world. Memory, as also the case of Smartt's *Black Mother* makes clear, is collective.

---

<sup>174</sup> G. Lukács, *Historical Novel in Speculative Fictions* 22.

<sup>175</sup> "Dorothea Smartt – Ship Shape," *Peepal Tree Press – book details*, 15 June 2013 <[http://www.peepaltreepress.com/single\\_book\\_display.asp?isbn=9781845230586](http://www.peepaltreepress.com/single_book_display.asp?isbn=9781845230586)>.

<sup>176</sup> *Worrying the Line* 6.



In *Ship Shape*, this collectivity is emphasised in a poem called “samboo’s elegy: no rhyme or reason”, which clearly refers to Smartt’s task to write a contemporary elegy for Samboo of Samboo’s Grave, to which she was commissioned by Lancaster Litfest in 2003. The process of giving voice to him proved very painful for her. As she recalls, she experienced “a rollercoaster of emotions, including anger, resentment and despair.”<sup>177</sup> In the poem, she accordingly refers to “flow of fears” and “flow of tears” flooding through her while she is “[l]ying at the site of Samboo’s grave,/ waiting for full earth to speak to me,/ waiting for buried bones to whisper.”<sup>178</sup> Samboo’s suffering becomes hers too; she seem to be physically undergoing the brutal treatment of the African – lying in the ship’s lower deck, unable to stretch out, heaving, breathing out, weighted with irons, smelling of vomit and excrements, sweating.<sup>179</sup> This very physical experience results in the narrator and the African uniting in one body. From now on it is “Bilal/ Poet” who speaks to the reader.

#### 4.2. “Bodymemory”

As the previous section illustrated, the legacy of struggle against racism and sexism continues to exert its influence upon twenty-first-century black women, who carry the lost past with them as a burden, a luggage which is yet to be unpacked. This condition can be seen as characteristic of the colonised/ third world condition more generally.

Accordingly, Breeze’s *Third World Girl* introduces herself saying: “I’m a third world girl/ uncut diamond/ unfound pearl/ wakened from my dreaming/ far too early for my years/ filled with stories/ yet untold/ young, unknowing/ born too old.”<sup>180</sup> She, the reader learns, was born with traces of the past on her body, which, pressured with their weight, ages prematurely. Such traces of the past that black femininity carries with it are a frequent motif in works by black women writers of different historical eras, age, social class, sexual orientation and ethnicity. In Marlene Nourbese Philip’s *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly*

---

<sup>177</sup> Dorothea Smartt, “About Ship Shape,” *Wordpress*, 11 September 2013 <<http://dorotheasmartt.wordpress.com/about-ship-shape/>>.

<sup>178</sup> D. Smartt, *Ship Shape* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008) 23-24.

<sup>179</sup> *Ship Shape* 23.

<sup>180</sup> J. B. Breeze, *Third World Girl* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2011) 141.

*Breaks*, for example, the traces of the past appear in the form of spoors – its heroine describes herself as “blood-spoored.”<sup>181</sup>

This notion of black female body a surface on which the memory has been painfully inscribed,<sup>182</sup> is a common concept among black Caribbean women writers, too. The body is depicted as a form of memory. It represents continuity because it remembers the forgotten and “not-known yet known.”<sup>183</sup> Bodymemory, McKittrick explains, is a corporeal continuity, which “allows silence and invisible body histories to be seeable, spatial, and ontological.”<sup>184</sup> In this sense, it represents black women’s strength as it keeps the knowledge of what has been repressed and has the capacity to uncover it.<sup>185</sup> Re-writing history (or rather, writing memory) therefore inevitably involves the body.

Again, similarly as discussed in the previous chapter in terms of geography, the past, in form of bodymemory, affects relationships, or even prevents their existence completely. *The Third World Girl* tells a relationship between her and a white male tourist, who comes on holiday to her island home. Firstly, the two people are separated by inequality that is a product of the history of colonialism. The past defines their present, as the woman explains to the man:

I was held out by the fences round my shores/ my water was locked  
off while you showered/ while you ordered extra ice, my sweat just  
poured/ your path was lit up/ while I struggled in the dark/ I  
worked with machete through the jungle/ while you strolled  
through a park// now neatly groomed/ I serve you cake and tea.<sup>186</sup>

Secondly and more importantly, it is her bodymemory, which prevents her from falling in love with him. As we already know, her body remembers; it carries on it the legacy of her female ancestors’ suffering under white men’s governance. This is very much evident when she explains why she and the tourist cannot be together, referring to her body and her womanhood: “[E]mpire’s over/ but the

---

<sup>181</sup> Marlene Nourbese Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks* (Ciudad de la Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1988) 9.

<sup>182</sup> *Haunting Capital* 3.

<sup>183</sup> Marlene Nourbese Philip, “Dis Place” in *Demonic Grounds* 49.

<sup>184</sup> *Demonic Grounds* 49.

<sup>185</sup> Raajev S. Patke, *Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 319.

<sup>186</sup> *Third World Girl* 141.

rape`s been done/ and the blood has been my story/ (...) Love at first sight/ only happens to the free.”<sup>187</sup>

By employing the concept of female genealogy as in *The Fifth Figure*, Breeze emphasises that “‘bodymemory’ is passed down and reinterpreted through generational remembrances, reachings, forewarnings, and advice.”<sup>188</sup> Taking the reader back to late nineteenth-century Jamaica, she chronicles lives of five generations of women, who were all, in one way or another, affected by the past and by their (female) ancestors` experience, in other words by their bodymemory. This, again, is a product of both the history of colonialism (i.e. racial discrimination) and of patriarchal domination (i.e. gender discrimination). Accordingly, their bodymemory is a legacy of conquest and invasion by men, which is determined by the man`s and woman`s position within the colonial divide.

Bodymemory also plays an important role in the discussion of the mother – daughter bond, as it was analysed in the previous chapter. As noted, in Jamaica Kincaid`s *Lucy*, for example, the main heroine asserted that her past is her mother. In works under scrutiny, too, the daughter`s alienation from the mother is caused by the past that the mother represents – the history of both imperial and gender oppression, in which, as the daughters often see it, they largely were complicit. Breaking the bond with the mother thus often means cutting the link with the past.

The mothers, too, attempt to break the burden of bodymemory and set their daughters free. In a racially hierarchal society, this wish affects firstly women`s choice of their future children`s father. In accordance with the notion of “good hair” and “bad hair”, as discussed in the previous chapter, the most important criteria become the skin shade and hair type. Susan, for example, marries a light-skinned man. Her daughter Amanda, too, falls in love with the German boy Max, thinking that if they have children “they would turn out dundus, which was our word for albino, as Max was blue eyed and blond.”<sup>189</sup> The same criteria are used when choosing a husband for one`s daughter – “near-whites”<sup>190</sup>, as Susan calls them, are valued most. The above discussed mothers` advice – “whatever you do,

---

<sup>187</sup> *Third World Girl* 141.

<sup>188</sup> *Demonic Grounds* 49.

<sup>189</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 33.

<sup>190</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 21.

stay away from the bush” – also shows that they want their daughters to take control of their own lives and achieve some extent of emancipation.

These efforts, however, largely fail, as it is also symbolised by the daughters` inability to take the mothers` advice. Woman after woman literally stumbles and falls over into arms of men that represent the other to them, be it in the sense of whiter skin and blonder hair (as in case of Amanda and Susan) or darker skin and more bushy hair (as in case of Emma and Sheba). Whole ancestral line of women, instead of taking control themselves, become “ready to be taken.”<sup>191</sup> For Susan, this subordination even involves physical and mental violence. For Amanda and Sheba, it results in unplanned pregnancies, which determine the course of their whole lives, while the fathers of their children leave them and continue living their independent lives.

Breeze`s genealogy can also be understood not as five women, but as one multi-layered character, in other words as one woman whose body carries the traces of the past in the form of experience of her female ancestors. This further emphasises the notion of black corporeal memory. Apart from Breeze`s work, bodymemory is also very prominent in Nichols` *Startling the Flying Fish*, where it is presented in the form of “the voices,/ nuances,” which the descendants – “the living African diasporic selves”<sup>192</sup> – cannot escape. Nichols` work, however, will only be analysed in more detail in Chapter 5.

#### **4.3. Ancestral figures**

At the imaginary beginning of such female genealogies, there always is an ancestral mother, a universal mother of mothers, who represents the Goddess of creation. In works under scrutiny, this character appears in various forms. In *The Fifth Figure*, for example, the ancestral mother is embodied in Nana – the black female slave who takes care of the Englishwoman Emma and later of her child Susan. Nana is the mother of the village; in Emma`s view Nana represents the bush. In *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, Grace Nichols, too, employs the

---

<sup>191</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 26.

<sup>192</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 6.

character of a Mother with capital M. Similarly Smartt's *Ship Shape* is narrated by "our living Black Mother."<sup>193</sup>

Other works employ more universal images of the ancestral mother. This primarily regards Smartt's *Connecting Medium*, where the poet introduces the character of Medusa, whom she describes as "godmother/ (...) our mother's mother/ myself all coiled into one."<sup>194</sup>

Throughout history, the Medusa myth was subjected to many conflicting representations and versions; the origins of some can be traced to long before the classical period.<sup>195</sup> According to some accounts, Medusa was originally a Libyan princess, who was adapted into a mythical serpent goddess worshipped by the Amazons. According to *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, she "symbolized female wisdom, female mysteries, and the cycle of nature as life, death and rebirth."<sup>196</sup>

According to *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, the classical myth presents her as a beautiful young woman endowed with exceptionally lovely hair, who is raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. Athena, jealous of Medusa's beauty and enraged by the sexual desecration of her temple, turns Medusa's hair into snakes and curses her with a petrifying stare.<sup>197</sup> In Greek mythological representations, Medusa was thus defiled as a vile and hideous monster, a woman with snaky locks and a power to turn to stone those who meet her gaze.<sup>198</sup> This negative representation has since then dominated the common parlance.

The Medusa myth has evidently also been strongly sexualised and appropriated to the Freudian notion of woman as "dark continent" as well as the territorialisation of female body more generally. According to the encyclopaedic accounts, since late Middle Ages, literary representations of Medusa focused on the conquering of her monstrosity by a virtuous hero. The myth also had its place

---

<sup>193</sup> *Ship Shape* 11.

<sup>194</sup> *Connecting Medium*

<sup>195</sup> E. K. Wallace, ed. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1996) 259.

<sup>196</sup> B. G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (Harper and Row, 1986)

<sup>197</sup> *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* 259.

<sup>198</sup> M. Sairsingh, "Transcending conventional identity structures: Dorothea Smartt's re-negotiated self-projections," *Journal of English and literature*, 3.7 (2012): 154-157, *Academic Journals*, 15 July 2013 <[http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379518328\\_Sairsingh.pdf](http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379518328_Sairsingh.pdf)>.

in the nineteenth-century's eroticisation of horror. Most recently, Sigmund Freud read the figure of Medusa as a castrating female.<sup>199</sup>

Twentieth-century feminist literary interpretations, however, revised the myth, reclaimed Medusa from this stigmatised position and quite successfully positioned her as a liberatory icon. They thereby redeemed the original representation of Medusa. This notion of the mythical figure as a vehicle for expressing the position of women battling patriarchal subjugation is evident for example in Helene Cixous' manifesto "The Laugh of the Medusa", Sylvia Plath's poem "Medusa", or May Sarton's "The Muse as Medusa".<sup>200</sup>

The above discussed tension between the beautiful Medusa and the monstrous one, as *The Medusa Reader* explains, "is intrinsic to the story, to the figure of Medusa herself, and to the twin strands of feminism and misogyny that have attached themselves to retellings of the Medusa myth throughout the ages."<sup>201</sup> This contradiction is equally important in Smartt's work as well as in other works by black women writers. In their case, this does not regard representations of Medusa only, but of the whole notion of the ancestral Black Mother more generally, primarily because of its racialisation.

Smartt's racialisation and re-appropriation of the already much appropriated character of Medusa is very much based on her personal experience of racism. As she recalls, children in her Brixton neighbour called her "Medusa" because of her hair. In turn, she explains, she "looked at herself through their eyes, and took that title back as a comic claim of the mythic status, and also a powerful way to connect with a powerful figure."<sup>202</sup> The incident made her first conduct preliminary research on the mythical figure. Based on it, she saw Medusa as a black woman and therefore an outcast, who was silenced by a history of racism and misunderstanding.<sup>203</sup>

In the context of what was said above, the Freudian notion of woman as a dark continent inevitably has much stronger appeal for Smartt than, for example,

---

<sup>199</sup> *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* 259.

<sup>200</sup> *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* 259.

<sup>201</sup> M. Garber and N. J. Vickers eds., *The Medusa Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003) introduction.

<sup>202</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, "Who's Looking at Who(m)? Re-Viewing Medusa" in *Sucking Salt* 111.

<sup>203</sup> *Sucking Salt* 117.

for Cixous. Smartt openly mines the motif of Medusa for a “black aesthetics.”<sup>204</sup> She perceived the negative construction of the character of Medusa as linked to the white men’s fear of the unknown and subsequent stereotyping and effort to assert dominance, as it was analysed in Chapter 2. As she explains, she thought to herself that “Medusa was probably some black woman with nappy hair, and some white man saw her and cried: ‘A monster!’ and feared her, and so told stories about her dangerous potential.”<sup>205</sup>

In *Connecting Medium*, Medusa, too, scares people. To some extent, this is inevitably caused by her fearful power to turn men into stone, with which Smartt, in line with the negative representation, empowered her. As the poet puts it, her *look* kills. In her case, however, the source of this power to immobilise seems to be her anger – anger towards the coloniser, towards white men, who participated on black women’s legacy of struggle and are therefore responsible for the ancestral mother’s suffering: “wid dem dutti-eye looks/ sapphire eyes/ (...) she could turn a man t`stone/ some whiteman/ nightmare riding/ he mind across the centuries/ in turning we mad./ Medusa/ dread anger/ welling up in her stare.”<sup>206</sup>

Primarily, however, it is her difference, that causes her hideousness and makes her a threat.<sup>207</sup> She thereby represents black women, whose status has historically been determined by their appearance. Medusa is an embodiment of otherness. She is marked as other by her geographical origin: “Medusa was a Blackwoman,/ afrikan/ dread (...) An Afrikanwoman.” Accordingly, it is her dark skin and dreadlocked hair that scare people. In the poem, she is described as “nappiheaded/ (...)/ too tuff/ too unruly/ too ugli` too black...”<sup>208</sup> Her otherness, emerging from her racial location, scares people; in other words, as Smartt notes, her *looks* kill.

Her otherness, however, does not make her weak. Medusa does not allow anybody to other her in the same way as it happened to black women; she cannot be silenced or colonised in any way. Instead, she assumes identities of the most important black women activists from antiquity to present – of Assata Shaku,

---

<sup>204</sup> “Writers: Dorothea Smartt.”

<sup>205</sup> “Who’s Looking at Who(m)?” in *Sucking Salt* 117.

<sup>206</sup> *Connecting Medium* 59.

<sup>207</sup> *Sucking Salt* 112.

<sup>208</sup> *Connecting Medium* 57.

Cherry Groce, Eleanor Bumpers, Audre Lorde, or Queen Nzinga.<sup>209</sup> The poet also compares her to Nanny, another frequent character symbolising the black female body as a weapon capable of combating violence of any kind.<sup>210</sup>

Smartt, similarly as twentieth-century white feminists, reclaims the image of the monstrous Medusa as an empowering historical symbol for black women, as also Gadsby analysed. More importantly, however, in *Connecting Medium*, she invokes Medusa in a representation of the cycle of life, death and rebirth, and puts emphasis on perpetual metamorphosis: “The yolk of myself opening, resonating/ Vibrating/ Story after story after life after death.”<sup>211</sup> She thereby reinforces the idea of self-fashioning and self-making.<sup>212</sup> By reclaiming individual aspects of her otherness as signs of strength and “internalizing the transformative power that the mythology surrounding her implies,”<sup>213</sup> Smartt writes a new version of history on which black women can base their present.

This transformation primarily regards hair, which, as Chapter 3 illustrated, have above all constituted an outward manifestation of otherness, non-desirable markers to ancestry. Smartt aims to turn this notion around and re-create black women’s confidence in what has been considered “bad hair”. As Gadsby noted, by “[m]aking a symbolic connection between her own dreadlocks and the snakes that extended from Medusa’s scalp, Smartt claims the implicit power that hair represents.”<sup>214</sup> The poet especially emphasised the spiritual importance of “hair as an antennae to the cosmos, power coil, circular imagery of matriarchal religious communities of women.” In such context, she explains, to straighten black hair basically means to unplug oneself from a power source.<sup>215</sup>

In *The Fifth Figure*, Breeze’s strong character – Susan – also views “bad hair” as a sign of strength. Son Son seems suitable as the father for her children as, although he is almost white, his hair is thick and curly as hers. As she explains:

---

<sup>209</sup> *Sucking Salt* 119.

<sup>210</sup> See for example Lorna Goodison’s poem “Nanny”.

<sup>211</sup> *Connecting Medium* 11.

<sup>212</sup> “Transcending conventional identity structures” 155.

<sup>213</sup> *Sucking Salt* 111, 113.

<sup>214</sup> *Sucking Salt* 111.

<sup>215</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, “Who’s Looking at Who(m)? Re-Viewing Medusa” in *Sucking Salt* 112.



“I was not having that thin and tangly mass on any of my children. It would make them seem like weak-livered whites rather than strong-blooded children.”<sup>216</sup>

Not only the markers to ancestry in form of skin colour or hair type, but also the land of one’s ancestors as such has empowering capacity. The power of the Caribbean, represented, as analysed in Chapter 2, by images of the bush, the rhythm and sway, which awaken senses, passion and sexuality, can be acquired for one’s own benefit. While for most women in *The Fifth Figure*, the influence of the land has destructive consequences, for the last woman whose story is told, it results in emancipation and independence. Nature makes her cheat on her husband: “My marriage didn’t last very long/ The wildness of bush/ And the passion of songs/ Kept me out dancing all night/ With lovers on the left/ And lovers on the right/ I did not even think it was wrong/ I just tumbled along/ Letting life take me where it led me”<sup>217</sup> Her achievement seems even more remarkable when we consider the fact that her husband is a geography teacher, a man, whose profession is to master geography and “conquer” the land.

Smartt’s character of Medusa further suggests that black female body, historically subjected to the coloniser’s gaze and constructed as monstrous and animal-like, should also be reclaimed as strong and beautiful. In *The Fifth Figure*, such reclamation is to some extent represented by Susan, who feels herself to be strong as a horse, living in her father’s body, and perceives Son Son’s motivations in cheating on her with weak-looking, light-skinned Eva as merely a need to protect someone.<sup>218</sup> Susan does not care about how the others perceive her; she is confident and proud of not needing any protection herself. As opposed to Susan, her youngest and whitest daughter Amanda, instead of being stronger, as her mother wished, evidently falls ill very often, or, as she explains: “Anything that passes through the village seems to get to me first, from the slightest cold to the longest fever.”<sup>219</sup>

One of the most important issues discussed in this context is the capacity of the female body to give birth to a new life. As discussed in Chapter 2, during the period of slavery this was controlled by the coloniser and was in fact at the

---

<sup>216</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 20.

<sup>217</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 70.

<sup>218</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 22.

<sup>219</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 32.

very centre of the whole colonial enterprise. In their works, black women writers often portray women who redeem this power of their bodies. During slavery, various gender-specific strategies were used by female slaves such as individual acts of sexual abstinence, abortion, or infanticide.<sup>220</sup> This aspect is primarily evident in the case of Dora Maar, whose ability to bear children is presented as controlled by Picasso's brush. In the process of her emancipation, she asks: "My camera/ my third-eye/ my Guernica witness -/ turn my negatives into positives./ my floating fetuses into life."<sup>221</sup>

For Breeze's strong character Susan, Son Son represents merely an instrument, which can provide her with children. Children, as noted above, represent new selves, who can make up for what the mothers could not achieve or did not do well. Susan is quite content with having a man who is "an animal in bed and if (...) [she] didn't throw him out each morning to go and work with his father, he would have given (...) [her] a new child before (...) [her] body recovered from the first." This is what she "had married him for, children, and lots of them."<sup>222</sup> Susan thereby acquires some extent of agency.

All these aspects, which have been at the centre of oppression and control by both imperial and patriarchal domination, are very much evident in Smartt's character of Medusa. By reclaiming Medusa as a positive goddess, Smartt takes inspiration from other black feminists such as Audre Lorde and encourages black women to "look upon themselves and other women and find beauty, instead of the monstrosity attributed to the goddess."<sup>223</sup> As the previous few paragraphs illustrate, this does not regard only skin or hair, but also other important bodily issues related to womanhood, in other words everything that centuries of hardship had sought to strip away. Because of her transformative power, Medusa becomes an instrument of such change.

Nichols' Dora Maar, too, is aware of Medusa's power, as it becomes clear when she asks her to help her "find (...) [her] inner bitch."<sup>224</sup> In accordance with the concept of transformation, she wants her "negatives" to be turned into

---

<sup>220</sup> *Ghosts of Slavery* xiv-xv.

<sup>221</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 17.

<sup>222</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 21.

<sup>223</sup> *Sucking Salt* 113.

<sup>224</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 16.

“positives.”<sup>225</sup> She wants her beautiful face, shattered by Picasso’s brush, back; she asks to be given back “the unbroken photography of it.”<sup>226</sup> Along with her face, Dora Maar reclaims her full birth name too – Henriette Theodora Markovitch. Thanks to Medusa, Dora Maar eventually acquires the power to leave the frame.

For black women writers, coming to terms with one’s body inevitably equals coming to terms with one’s past and re-establishing strong connection with one’s ancestry. This is because in their works the body is also seen as markers of ancestry. Through the transformation, which the poet encourages black women to undergo, such connection – represented by otherness inscribed on the body – becomes a source of pride rather than of shame.

#### **4.4. Chapter Summary**

Black women writers, this chapter has shown, put strong emphasis on the past being uncovered, analysed, discussed. As Smartt noted, denial “is only debt/ with interest to be paid.”<sup>227</sup> Similarly as the female body first has to be exposed “as a surface painfully inscribed with the memory of blackness” in order for it to be reclaimed, the past, buried under myths of the dominant narrative, has to be retold. This, inevitably, is a painful process. To those whose history was silenced, its reconstruction brings along pain and suffering, as the cases of Smartt or Levy make clear. For the others, those who were complicit in colonialism and participated on the construction of the dominant narrative, it means shame and guilt, as will be further discussed in the following chapter.

To return to the above discussed concept of bodymemory, speaking out the past – the memory – also means to remove the burden of the past from the body. The collective body is thus symbolically liberated, it is re-born, transformed. Lifting the fog of the centuries is thereby crucial for the future. Only such process can make people free and bring bright future. Accordingly, Breeze’s Third World Girl informs the tourist that their “meeting needs to face history” and asks him to “tell the present what’s become of you and me/ before the future brings the

---

<sup>225</sup> Picasso, *I Want My Face Back* 17.

<sup>226</sup> Picasso, *I Want My Face Back* 16.

<sup>227</sup> *Ship Shape* 20.

possibility/ Love at first sight/ only happens to the free.”<sup>228</sup> This quotation also suggests that acknowledging that such extreme evil has been done does not necessarily mean the end, but quite on the contrary. This healing vision will be discussed in the following chapter.

---

<sup>228</sup> *Third World Girl* 141.

## 5. The Third Space, or when place and time cross

The previous two chapters illustrate how temporal and geographical boundaries are blurred. Here and now, it becomes clear, cannot exist without then and there. The present does not make sense without the past; England without the Caribbean. This interconnection is inevitable. As also Andrea Levy noted, the island societies “would not exist as they do today were it not for Britain, and Britain would certainly do not exist as it is today were it not for those islands.”<sup>229</sup> Not only historical chronology and geographical lineages are challenged. So, too, the very distinction between the categories of time and place becomes hazy as references to land evidently cannot exist without references to history, as well as the other way round.

The new space, which emerges when place and time cross, is a space beyond existing political, social and cultural boundaries, a space of revaluation.<sup>230</sup> Its purpose is to revise and hybridise – to destabilise – the settled discursive hierarchies, or, in other words, to provide a healing vision for the colonised body. This chapter aims to analyse the character of this space in literary works under scrutiny. Focus will primarily be put on Grace Nichols’ *Startling the Flying Fish*, which was only rarely referred to in the previous chapters, more particularly on the character of Cariwoma. This part will also prepare the ground for the concluding chapter as it will examine the third space in terms of its impact on its occupants.

### 5.1. The Cariwoma spirit

Grace Nichols’s book of poems is written in the voice of Cariwoma, who, as her name suggests, is the female embodiment of the Caribbean. Her body is united with the land. As she explains, she has always carried these islands deep inside her, “Sky-deep/ Sea-deep.” She has held them to her “coral bones.” Wind and Shore are her close companions; her home is a sea-house with many mansions. With regard to Nichols’ origin in British Guyana, Cariwoma also

---

<sup>229</sup> *The Long Song* 415.

<sup>230</sup> *Narrative for a New Belonging* 1.

embraces the Andes, or Macchu Picchu, rainforests and waterfalls of South American continent; as she puts it, she occupies “[t]his green space where the Caribbean/ and Amazon collide.”<sup>231</sup>

Her geographical focus, however, is much wider. Firstly it involves colonised, invaded, conquered places, where tribes of indigenous peoples were decimated – places as various as America, Africa or Asia. Cariwoma, however, also represents the ancestral mother, the goddess of creation even more universal than Smartt’s Black Mother. She is the mother of all immigrants around the world. As her poems make clear, her children are generations of “migrating spider-birds”, of “movers” in Europe, in the United States, in Canada, and other places overseas where they carry “the Cariwoma spirit.” Cariwoma’s body, it is evident, is universal; her body is the land of the world.

The land is powerful in that it knows the past as it really happened – it bears witness to everything that happens. Its gaze is also unconquered in that its power cannot be taken away by men. The eyes of nature cannot be violently closed by the coloniser. On the other hand, though knowledgeable, Popocatepetl or Iztaccihuatl can only speak the language of smoke, not the language of words. In other words the land lacks means to communicate its knowledge, its “bodymemory/ landmemory” to people.

Through the eyes of nature, Cariwoma, too, “watched history happen.” She listens as the wind unfurls its scroll of old names on her breath and then uses her power to speak and whispers through the “artifacts of her shells” both to the living and the dead. To the dead she offers “a treatise/ of continuous remembering” in form of “memorials between rocks/ (...) altar-places between weeds.” To the living, she promises to write back those stories that were erased, bring to life forgotten gods and tribes, which, as she notes, are “waiting to be re-fleshed by me/ all waiting to be awakened with a kiss/ like sleeping beauty.”<sup>232</sup>

Cariwoma’s storytelling goes back to conquests and invasions, to Columbus’ three ships – Pinta Nina and Santa Maria – sailing over her “tongue’s edge in a litany,”<sup>233</sup> to Amerigo Vesputti, to stories of colonisers, of invaders. She discusses their motivations, that primarily being greed and lust for power and

---

<sup>231</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 9, 36.

<sup>232</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 10, 40.

<sup>233</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 21.

money. From this important moment in the history of her territory/ her body, she moves on to talk about the people whom such invasions affected most – Amerindian tribes of Guyana (Wapishana, Macusi, Warrau), ancient civilisations of Mexico (the Olmecs, the Mayans, the Aztecs), of Africa, India, the Americas.

A whole poem is dedicated to Malinche, or the “prodigal mother of the mestizo,” whom history constructed as a betrayer of her own people. The word Malinchista even became an insulting expression for betrayal. Malinche feels that her voice has been suppressed by history; her footsteps were “dogged from childhood/ by whispers, rumours, shadows.”<sup>234</sup> Cariwoma encourages her to talk, to tell the story from her own perspective.

These ancient stories are linked to twentieth- and twenty-first-century events, mostly to experience of immigrants in the metropolis. Immigrants are depicted saying goodbye to their families in front of airport buildings, in departure lounges. No matter where in the world they are, they all share their dream of “El Dorado”, hoping to have a better life in England, the USA, or Canada. As one of Cariwoma’s children emphasises, she does not hope for “twinkling Arawak gold,” but only for “a piece of life, upward and bright.”<sup>235</sup> Reality, however, differs considerably. Cariwoma tells the story of immigrants’ everyday problems, barriers they have to face, as well as hopes for improvement, in which whole families are involved, separated by both natural (ocean) and human-imposed barriers (border controls):

A crisis of papers unfixed,/ two three jobs as domestic/ and  
weathering the cold/ the barrel in her kitchen-corner/ a ship’s hold,  
constantly/ waiting to be filled –// This time with bargain clothes,/  
employers’ cast-offs/ for the children back home./ The children all  
waiting for her/ to find a survival-kit/ that would lead to  
citizenship/ (a few Anansi tricks)/ Waiting for her to clear/ a sky of  
fog, a path of snow,/ so that they could follow.<sup>236</sup>

From the temporal point of view, too, Cariwoma holds the past and the present in one vision. Then and now, the previous paragraph demonstrates, are linked by Cariwoma’s use of similar images for different historical stages. To describe the present, Cariwoma also uses vocabulary that evokes the past. In many

---

<sup>234</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 26, 27.

<sup>235</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 55.

<sup>236</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 5.

poems, focus is put on the relocation journey on a ship where twentieth-century immigrants, too, are “matchboxed to a group (...) [they] hardly know” only to come to Britain, where “[t]heir indentured mud-/ stained feet, soon embroidered/ like the slave’s ship instep to the fields.”<sup>237</sup>

Furthermore, the past and the present are connected by mythology. Mythology, in form of gods, goddesses and beliefs – is relevant across historical eras and geographical locations. The above paragraph, for example, mentions Anansi, “[m]ythical shape-shifting spider of West African cosmology and the wily trickster figure of West Indian Anancy folktales.” In Nichols’ work, Anansi helps the immigrants outwit the web of immigration laws. Another mythical figure Hanuman – “[l]oyal monkey of Hindu mythology”<sup>238</sup> with its many arms – is used to console those who are left behind. Cariwoma further engages women from Greek mythology – Cassandra, Helen, Penelope, or Persephone, Yoruba gods and goddesses, or Hindu gods. She also references vegetables, fruits and meats, which are central to various superstitions and beliefs.

To sum up, the character of Cariwoma is both an inherent part of the land, as she is of history. Cariwoma, it is evident from the above examples, draws a map of both places and time. The former is created by tracking her children, who carry “the silver threads/ of their linkages”<sup>239</sup> to different parts of the world. To create the latter, she pushes back lianas of time, as she puts it, and breathes new life into forgotten stories. As Sarah Crown asserted in her review of the book, she holds “the entirety of the landscape, history and people in her vision, and weaving them for us into a brilliant, fluid whole.”<sup>240</sup>

This whole – the map – represents a healing vision, which is to help Cariwoma’s children – movers – find their path. It reconstructs what was lost both in terms of geography and history. For his own purposes, the coloniser reduced the complex space – including the land and its history – to a place, to a simplified cartographic map. Colonialism and imperialism denied the importance of the past, of mythology, which becomes apparent for example in the process of renaming.

---

<sup>237</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 5.

<sup>238</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 91, 93.

<sup>239</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 3.

<sup>240</sup> Sarah Crown, “Seamstress of the Caribbean,” *The Guardian – Culture - Books*, 17 June 2006, 22 December 2013 <  
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jun/17/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>>.



By giving the land a spirit – the Cariwoma spirit – Nichols reclaims the space in all its complexity. Territorialisation, again, is used as a master`s tool to dismantle the master`s house.

## 5.2. Rootless cosmopolitans

Black women writers, it is evident, define their present selves based on their geographical as well as historical linkages. As Dorothea Smartt makes clear in *Connecting Medium*, what matters is not only the actual process of relocation from the Caribbean to England, but also the voices of her ancestors: “How many hundreds of thousand,/ Island voices./ Mother Father Stories?/ Your coming made me as I am (...).”<sup>241</sup>

All the above diaspora lines – temporal, geographical, bodily – weave people in a worldwide web in which the local and global merge. This transitional space becomes the source of identity creation. To finish the above identification line, Dorothea Smartt describes herself as “(...) not a Clarendon girl, or a/ Bridgetown girl, but a/ norf, sauf, west, east London/ of a girl, even/ a different kinda Essex girl,/ the kinda Blackwoman/ the world ain’t seen yet.”<sup>242</sup>

Most writers and theoreticians have talked about two aspects of identity representing dual allegiance to family in both locations – the place where one`s parents were born and the place where one resides; in case of Levy, Smartt, Nichols and Breeze therefore the Caribbean and England. Salman Rushdie, for example, saw immigrants as sometimes straddling two cultures, at other times falling between two stools.<sup>243</sup> Gadsby, too, situated the notion of home for such writers as Smartt between two locations – London and Barbados.<sup>244</sup> Similarly *Sage Handbook of Identities* uses vocabulary such as “both”, “dual”, “choosing one over the other”.<sup>245</sup> Some authors have involved a third aspect – that of Africa. Caryl Phillips, for example, asserted that his Atlantic home is in fact “triangular in shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the new

---

<sup>241</sup> *Connecting Medium* 14.

<sup>242</sup> *Connecting Medium* 14.

<sup>243</sup> S. Rushdie, “*Imaginary Homelands*,” *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 15.

<sup>244</sup> *Sucking Salt* 110.

<sup>245</sup> M. Wetherell and Ch. T. Mohanty, eds. *Sage Handbook of Identities* (Londong: SAGE Publications, 2010) 452.

world of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle.”<sup>246</sup>

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy extended the notion of home and identity by talking about “the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas” and creating the concept of black Atlantic culture, which is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but all of these at once. Its themes and techniques “transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce something new and, until now, unremarked.”<sup>247</sup>

The notion of home for Smartt’s new “kinda Blackwoman” or Nichols’ Cariwoma is evidently even more universal. They are true cosmopolitans, who give up on place and time. Home for them is everywhere with the recognition, as *Sage Handbook of Identities* emphasises, that living at home may become completely untenable. Rather than seeing two aspects of their identity as either compatible or not, it is necessary to see it as a complex mixture of temporal, geographical, and physical aspects. For the Blackwoman, Cariwoma and others, the only stable notion of a home is the body.

### 5.3. The value of the Third Space

In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie wrote that “however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.” Rushdie considers literature in part as the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality. Immigrant writers’ distance – long geographical perspective – may in his opinion provide them with such angles.<sup>248</sup>

Not only long geographical perspective, but equally also long historical perceptive, as discussed above, provide black women with new angles at which to enter reality. The topics, at the centre of which are black women, have already been outlined above. Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy, however, do not confine their focus to black women only, neither to black men or racial issues more generally. As Andrea Levy noted: “None of my books is just about race. They are

---

<sup>246</sup> C. Phillips, *A New World Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002) 305.

<sup>247</sup> P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1993) book cover.

<sup>248</sup> “Imaginary Homelands” 15-16.

about people and history.”<sup>249</sup> The third space empowers black women writers to be a conduit for stories and narratives from various perspectives, which together form the whole picture.

Such universal perspective is very much evident in most works under scrutiny in that they, too, tell stories of other people involved, not merely of black women. People of various racial and social backgrounds are depicted, men and women, individual characters. To strategically essentialise them for our purposes, white men, white women, and black men – all of whom have, as illustrated in Chapter 2, been to some extent responsible for black women’s othering and colonisation – are depicted as individual characters, whose behaviour is very much determined by their background, their upbringing, by values and notions of the good and bad that the society along with “history” as they learnt it at school taught them. Racist or chauvinistic characters are therefore not an exception in the books, as they are not in reality.

In *The Fifth Figure*, Jean Binta Breeze, for example, focuses on behaviour of colonised men. Firstly, her work deals with male promiscuity in the context of racially hierarchal society, where even skin shades define one’s social position. As mentioned in Chapter 3, when Son Son starts cheating on Susan with Eva, “one of those fine-boned and delicate girls who had come out more white than black,” Susan describes his behaviour as expectable, though in her personal view illogical. Son Son’s obsession with white skin as a sign of privilege is a phenomenon typical for the islands. This is also made clear by other examples of men who give preference to a short romance with a white Englishwomen over their long-term Caribbean girlfriends, as is the case of Michael in Levy’s *Small Island*. He, too, is fascinated by Mrs Ryder’s short blond hair and delicate skin, which Hortense describes as “so thin that in places it revealed a fine blue tracery of veins.”<sup>250</sup>

What regards colonised men’s perspective, colonialism, as noted in Chapter 2, affected gender relations within colonised societies by disenfranchising men and thereby often intensified patriarchal oppression. In Susan’s life, Son Son is soon replaced by Woody, who is an alcoholic and regularly beats her. For his

---

<sup>249</sup> *The Long Song* - reading group questions.

<sup>250</sup> *Small Island* 45.

character, too, a background is provided, which, though it does not justify his behaviour, presents Woody as a more sympathetic character. Woody, though almost white, is “dirt poor.” For such type of men, Susan notes, she is “a fine catch” as women of her colour (she, too, has a lighter skin as her mother was English) and wealth would normally have nothing to do with a man like him. Woody is a labourer, who hires himself out weeding and planting other people’s fields. He had often worked for Susan too, before they met. As she explains, alcohol is a common recourse for some men, especially those who still cut cane down on the plantation. As Susan’s whitest daughter Amanda perceives it, “[h]e probably loved her [Susan] for her strength but found himself too weak to live with it.”<sup>251</sup> Although, also because of her skin-colour-wise privileged position, Amanda may perceive this as mere reversion of gender roles, for Susan her strength is the only thing that enables her to sustain life with Woody.

White women, who held power over both colonised men and colonised women, are also given a voice. As noted above, women, similarly as colonised subjects, represented the other, i.e. the inferior. Inevitably, therefore, gender inequalities played an important role on the side of the coloniser. Women did not experience imperialism in the same way as men. White men were the most direct agents of empire, they were those who made and enforced laws and policies in their own interest:

it was white men who manned the merchant ships and wielded the rifles of the colonial armies, white men who owned and oversaw the mines and slave plantations, white men who commanded the global flows of capital and rubber-stamped the laws of the imperial bureaucracies; (...) it was white European men who, by the close of the nineteenth century, owned and managed 85 percent of the earth’s surface.<sup>252</sup>

White women’s position within the process was therefore ambiguous. As the above quotation illustrates, they were barred from the corridors of formal power; “[m]arital laws, property laws, land laws and the intractable violence of male decree bound them in gendered patterns of disadvantage and frustration.” On the other hand, as noted above, white women were superior in the context of racial

---

<sup>251</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 25.

<sup>252</sup> *Imperial Leather* 5-6.

hierarchy and held power over both colonised women and colonised men. They were complicit in the system and often assisted their husbands or male relatives by running their households and carrying out other tasks as required.<sup>253</sup>

The story of Emma from Breeze's *The Fifth Figure* has already been analysed in the previous chapters. Similarly as Emma, Caroline Mortimer from *The Long Song* is a white Englishwoman. She comes to Jamaica to live with her brother and recover from her husband's death. Though she is superior in terms of racial hierarchy, her position is ambiguous because of gender boundaries, as also discussed in Chapter 2. She is barred from the corridors of power and has to do what her brother tells her. Even though at the beginning she seems open-minded and wants to explore the islands and their culture, she soon adopts her brother's approach to the colonised subjects.

Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* devotes two poems to the perspective of the white woman, more particularly to the captain's wife. As the reader learns in the poem titled simply "the captain's wife's story", she is in a very bad mental state and suffers from frequent nightmares. Quite fittingly, she describes her condition as "dis-ease that poured out in fainting-/ spells and anonymous pains of the body." She is aware of the brutality of the business her husband is engaged in as well as of the myth, which is supposed to cover it. As she also notes, she is "no senseless London lady," who could pretend to believe that her husband is a mere ship captain, "agent of the interests of/ Lancaster's Quakers, now gross grocers,/ their faith displaced by greed." This knowing and her inability to "un-know", which is in contrast to the denial of London ladies, lead her into despair. She cannot help herself seeing her loving husband as "an incubus", an identity, which seems completely irreconcilable with his other self: "His hands and eyes hold me with love, the same/ hands that strip the Negro of his flesh,/ prise open, dig the enslaved's wounds/ stroking them with briny waters for discipline."<sup>254</sup>

Her loving husband is troubled that she is alone while he voyages. To ease her hardship and comfort her days, he delivers to her a black boy, the above analysed "Samboo" (Smartt's Bilal). While he believes that "it" will amuse her, remind her of him and "be the envy of the local ladies," her reaction is completely

---

<sup>253</sup> *Imperial Leather* 6.

<sup>254</sup> *Ship Shape* 27.

incomprehensible to him, as Smartt describes in a poem titled “the present arrives”. The wife starts screaming, demanding “it”/ “that thing” to be taken out of her sight. Her disgust is manifested by her bodily reactions: “My insides run against me,/ sweat shivers, my body gives way. (...) A gust of saliva rushes my mouth.”<sup>255</sup>

In her reaction, the reader can sense racism and perception of one’s own racial superiority. She pays no attention to the boy’s feelings, to the fact that he was brought to be liked, as a mere object. She, too, objectifies him by calling him “it”. She has no sympathy for him and is only concerned with herself. In spite of this, in the context of the first poem, captain’s wife, too, is presented as a complex character whose behaviour cannot be easily scorned.

The complexity of the situation is emphasised by the fact that the perspective of all three people involved is provided in separate sections of the poem. The whole picture is thereby drawn in just one piece of work. The reader also learns about Bilal’s feelings, who is first stabled with horses, then presented as a gift, trying to smile so as to please his master’s wife, but only being able to grin, exposing his teeth, which paradoxically scares her even more. In her screams he senses his end, which, as already noted above, also soon comes.

Apart from Sambo/ Bilal and the captain’s wife, the captain himself, too, is given a chance to share his point of view. While he cares much about his wife’s mental health and sends her letters in which “[h]e documents the minutiae/ of his household,” the ship, with two hundred heaving Africans, for obvious reasons remains “a void.” More generally, the perspective of slave ship sailors is provided, of those responsible for the cargo to make the crossing, for “keeping Africans tamed and able for sale.” Homesick, they dance on the decks so as not to hear “the deep choral undertow of African/ voices rolling below.” Drinking rum-pint after rum-pint, they hope to soothe themselves into what Smartt calls “a convenient forgetfulness.”<sup>256</sup>

A poem titled “a sailor’s life i” tells the story of a “newly press-ganged” sailor, who witnesses an experienced fellow sailor – “a hardened seafarer” – tossing aboard a sea-born baby, because it cannot be sold. The enraged young

---

<sup>255</sup> *Ship Shape* 43.

<sup>256</sup> *Ship Shape* 18.

sailor does not pretend not to have seen it, but instead acts according to his moral values. This, however, does not change anything anyway: “Initiate, he`d flogged a shipmate/ near to bloody death/ and was then made to crap in his mout; broke rations of rum;/ at the highpoint of the mainmast,/ eye on the horizon,// the climbing told he was/ a sea born-again man.”<sup>257</sup>

In *Small Island*, Levy portrays Bernard, a racist white Englishman. As she explains in the afterword to her novel, when she created this character it was important for her to really understand why he was the way he was. *Small Island*, she notes, is set at the time when Britain began to change into a multicultural society. She explains his behaviour as a way of coping with this change. As she explains, Bernard had “been brought up to see the world, and his place in the world, in a certain way. When that world started to change and his position was challenged he responded in the only way he knew – by asserting his sense of superiority.”<sup>258</sup> Levy`s intention was not to present Bernard as an evil character, but as misguided, foolish, bigoted, and stubborn.

#### **5.4. The world as a place for every/body**

All writers under scrutiny indeed paint a bigger picture; their works transcend race and gender and speak to the larger human condition. Discrimination, marginalisation and othering (as analysed in Chapters 2, 3, 4), their works show, have terrible consequences not only for those who are their objects, but for everybody involved and thereby for the whole humanity.

As the previous chapters illustrated, emphasis is put on aspects of life, which have the potential to link people together, to stress what people have in common instead of reiterating differences. In Smartt`s *Connecting Medium*, Nichols` *Startling the Flying Fish*, and Breeze`s *The Fifth Figure*, emphasis is put on music. Smartt even works with music as the black female goddess of creation; music is metaphorically represented as spiritual essence and creative impulse.<sup>259</sup> Music allows fusion of the body and the universe.

---

<sup>257</sup> *Ship Shape* 25.

<sup>258</sup> *Small Island* – interview with Andrea Levy.

<sup>259</sup> “Transcending conventional identity structures” 155.

Nature, too, is the same for everybody. Nature as a uniting, linking factor for people across geographical locations and historical eras, is especially important for the above discussed character of Nichols' Cariwoma.

In this context, works under scrutiny often reference the moon, which again is often used as a symbol uniting people around the world. The image of the moon – “the white light of the moon”, “the full moon”, “a moonlit night” – is very frequently used for example by Smartt in *Connecting Medium*. Most importantly, Nichols uses images of the moon, sun and stars as symbols of humanity, as they are same for everybody. The poet participates on the reconstruction of history and land in order to provide a solid basis for the present and future of all immigrants around the world. She devotes a whole poem to explain why this must be done. Its last four lines sum up the whole message: “So that Sun, Moon, Stars would not suddenly vanish// So that the earth would not be plunged/ into everlasting darkness – for this.”<sup>260</sup>

To sum up, in works by Smartt, Levy, Breeze and Nichols, geography is always human, as is the past. They write new maps, which do not easily follow existing cartographic rules, borders and lines. They give up on land as a divisive aspect. To paraphrase McKittrick's comment on Dionne Brand, they not only refuse a comfortable belonging to nation, or country, or a local street, they alter them by demonstrating that geography, the material world, is infused with sensations and distinct ways of knowing. Their “decision, to give up on land, to want no country, to disclose that geography is always human and that humanness is always geographic – blood, bones, hands, lips, wrists, this is your land, your planet, your road, your sea – suggests that (...) [their] surroundings are speakable.”<sup>261</sup>

### **5.5. Where the Third Space collides with reality**

It is important to note, however, that for this empowering space to emerge, there first had to be a loss – loss of the past, loss of the land, loss of the body. The strength of the loss, it seems, affected the strength of the reclamation, of the “growing back.” Accordingly, this image of growth of something that was cut –

---

<sup>260</sup> *Startling the Flying Fish* 43.

<sup>261</sup> *Demonic Grounds* ix.



primarily cane, bush, or hair – is often used in works under scrutiny. “Cut it and it will grow back,” notes, for example, July in Levy’s *The Long Island*, when commenting on the cane.

That the third space emerges as a counter weapon to oppression and silence is also clear from the way Medusa is used in Smartt’s *Connecting Medium*. As the poet explains: “Medusa is my shield/ impregnable/my aegis -/ no mythical aegeanpeople shield/ this is my armour/ with Shango double-headed axe/ Yemoja-Ocuti/ my battle dress armour/ of serious dread.”<sup>262</sup> Through such images, the writers make clear that their writing back is a response to racism and gender oppression, to their present twenty-first-century suffering.

Neither the books are a collection of happy endings. For most of the characters, the achievement is not complete. The fifth character in Breeze’s genealogy is the first one who can, to a large extent, do what she wants. She quits her teaching job and starts writing and performing. She acquires some control over her body in a sense that she is not dependent on any man; she even cheats on her husband. Her children are her “very own patchwork quilt”: “Three children of different colours/ What hillside had taken five generations to do/ I had done in one.”<sup>263</sup>

One day, however, she has a car accident during which a child is killed. After what she describes as a “meeting of metal and blood”, she starts hearing voices. Sometimes, she says, the voices would tell a story “[t]hat was easy to write/ That would shed some light.” Mostly, however, they were the voices of death, which threaten to take away her own daughter. She soon is diagnosed schizophrenia. The voices are strongest when she comes to Johannesburg with her children. In this city, “[w]here the colours still hated each other”, she becomes paralysed by fear of her children; her mind breaks. She realises that her home is in Jamaica, where neither she nor her “rainbow children” are endangered because of their skin colour. Her ancestors’ past in form of her grandmother’s stories represents something from which she can draw comfort at the hardest moments in

---

<sup>262</sup> *Connecting Medium* 60.

<sup>263</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 77.

her life: “And when the voices disturb me/ When death seems to take over my pen/ I sit quietly mongs the mahoe trees/ And sing Granny Sheba’s songs.”<sup>264</sup>

Nichols’s Dora Maar, too, although she is no longer “framed”, acquires merely “imperfect wings”. Moreover, as she notes, there still remains a weeping woman in the picture. This woman very much reminds us of Smartt’s Medusa, Nichols’ Cariwoma and the ancestral mothers more generally. She is the mother of all those whose lives have been affected by colonialism, by racial and gender othering and discrimination. In this sense, she also embodies humanity, as it was discussed above:

There will always be a weeping woman./ (...)weeping her  
Hiroshima of tears./ She’s weeping for her Mother/ who shares the  
bread of a burnt mouse/ among her children, as Christ/ would have  
shared the last supper./ She’s weeping like John Clare/ for the little  
horned-snail/ suddenly crushed out in its trail./ All the sad and  
broken things of the world, the small hopes that will never be  
noticed/ or nurtured by anyone./ When there is no more eye-water/  
When the heart has curled up/ tighter than a flower or a stone -/  
you’ll turn to find in her/ a deep and constant source.<sup>265</sup>

Although certain extent of emancipation has been achieved, there still is a long way to go, as also Smartt made clear in one of her poems: “we have come a long way/and still have a way to go”<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>264</sup> *The Fifth Figure* 79.

<sup>265</sup> *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* 20.

<sup>266</sup> *Connecting Medium* 67.

## 6. Conclusion

In their works, Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy engage in discussions of the land and the past in order to create a multi-layered space, a space where two-dimensional colonial maps of the territory (and the body) change into complex four-dimensional spaces. They thereby create what McKittrick called “a space to rethink the complex linkages between history, blackness, race, and place.”<sup>267</sup> The previous three chapters, I believe, sufficiently analysed specific manifestation of these phenomena in literary works under scrutiny.

This chapter aims to discuss the outcomes in relation to theory, which worked as a framework for this analysis. Moving on from the specific focus on British Caribbean women writers, broader links will be made, situating this local issue into the global order and justifying the initial claim that this analysis is bound to shed light on the perspective of a third world woman living in the metropolis. Before tackling these particular issues, however, ideas will be suggested, which are worth further research, but could not be involved in this thesis due to both time and space constraints as well as its inevitably narrow focus.

### 6.1. Suggestions for further research

Within the concept of writing back, language and form undoubtedly play an important role. As indicated in the introduction, language has been one of the main features of imperial oppression; it has represented “the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established.”<sup>268</sup> The imperial education system, Ashcroft et al. explain, installed a standard version of the metropolitan language – English – as the norm, and marginalised all variants – what they refer to as “english” – as impurities. In the Caribbean, a whole continuum of varieties developed, indicating thereby not only one’s geographical

---

<sup>267</sup> *Demonic Grounds* 143.

<sup>268</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 7.

origin, but also social position – Standard English being at one end and Creole at the other.

Similarly as Creole, the oral traditions lacked respectability and social status. They were despised as coming from the offspring of slaves, whom colonial administration considered illiterate, uncultured, and stupid. In the dominant cultural space orality was replaced by colonial print culture and was therefore only preserved outside the official channels of communication where songs, proverbs, riddles and folk tales remained an important means for transmission of popular materials from one generation of the colonised peoples to the next. It took a long time before both Creole and orality were used in poems, performances and print, challenging “the assumption that in creating works of art, the standard form of a European language was the only way to access either the local or the universal.”<sup>269</sup>

Both Creole and orality therefore inevitably are at the centre of British Caribbean women writers` writing back. Grace Nichols described what she called “the struggle with language” that she had to endure “in the interest of preserving, recovering, remembering, and relegitimizing her Creole language.” She also places a strong emphasis on rhythm, musicality and the sound of words, writing very much “for the ear.”<sup>270</sup> Breeze, too, “moves freely across the continuum from Creole to Standard English, just as she moves fluently from the performance stage to the printed page.”<sup>271</sup> Smartt and Levy, too, intertwine Standard English and Creole.

Although almost all texts referred to throughout this thesis use either the coloniser`s language or that of a dominant social order, this language, as Bromley put it, “has been dislocated and acted upon, violated even.”<sup>272</sup> The writers thereby manage to wrest the language from the dominant European culture; rejecting the language of masculinity and colonisation, and using it for their own purposes, thereby “suggesting the likelihood that differences in dialect do not affect the underlying humanity.”<sup>273</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> *Postcolonial Poetry in English* 97.

<sup>270</sup> “Grace Nichols,” *British Council – Literature*, 19 November 2013<  
<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/grace-nichols>>.

<sup>271</sup> *Postcolonial Poetry in English* 194.

<sup>272</sup> *Narratives for a New Belonging* 2.

<sup>273</sup> *Postcolonial Poetry in English* 194.

## 6.2. A humanist vision: the space where all wounds heal

In works by Nichols, Breeze, Levy and Smartt, time and place indeed become fluid categories. Accordingly, the emergent space, which is (re-)created when these two layers cross, indeed corresponds very much to Bhabha's notion of the Third Space, or the beyond, as he also calls it, characterised by "exploratory, restless movement – here and there, on all sides, forth/ da, hither and thither, back and forth."<sup>274</sup>

The aim of this space is to dismantle and rework the othering discourse, to elude the politics of polarity, to challenge "existing referential notions of cultural authenticity and traditional, stable identity."<sup>275</sup> To use Bhabha's words, it represents an attempt to invade, alarm, divide and dispossess, with desirable effects both on the individual as well as on larger public level. As he explains, it provides "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself." This also is why the third space carries the burden of the meaning of culture.<sup>276</sup>

In the above discussed works, the third space represents a healing vision. It thereby also refers back to specifically female spheres of agency that, as Parry and others asserted, Spivak overlooked in her discussion of the subaltern's agency. In accordance with Bhabha's reference to both individual and communal levels, in the third space, British-Caribbean women writers do not only inscribe themselves as healers of the black female body, but primarily of the collective colonised body.

The healing capacity of the female body, as discussed above, enables the writers to produce the third space as a positive empowering environment. The body, however, fulfils other important roles. Primarily, it is a common aspect of all humanity, the ultimate link between all people from various places in the world, of various cultures, religions, social classes, genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations. It thereby bridges a gap, which has historically been constructed by various types of othering discourses. Moreover, the body is also a useful motif because of its capacity to bear further generations. Healing its injuries thereby

---

<sup>274</sup> *The Location of Culture* 2.

<sup>275</sup> *Narratives for a New Belonging* 67.

<sup>276</sup> *The Location of Culture* 2, 38-39.

becomes key not only for the present, but also for the future. As Cariwoma puts it when talking about her migrant children – “for them all I must keep green.”

However, as the above stories of our heroines make clear, the healing process does not necessarily have to be successful. As Dora Maar’s imperfect wings or Breeze’s heroine’s schizophrenia make clear, there are other factors, which determine the course and success of the process. Even the most positive scenario whereby the healing process is completed leaves behind a weeping woman – scars, which may take a few generations’ time to disappear.

Unlike in Bhabha’s theoretical works, the third space in works under scrutiny is not conceived as an isolated literary phenomenon and the condition therefore is not uncritically celebrated. Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy, while providing a positive third space as a healing vision, put strong emphasis on reality – or, on what exists beyond the text. Such reality, they make clear is determined by political, social, and economic inequalities, by persisting racism and discrimination based on binary oppositions of “us” and “them”, on categorisation and othering, on strictly defined and exclusive definitions of identity and belonging. It therefore presents migrant/ marginalised/ colonised individuals with only hardly surmountable barriers to the achievement of the empowering, enriching third space. Instead of fluidity, rootlessness and plurality, their condition is therefore often characterised by immobility, local confinement and partiality. This, the above discussed works make clear, is not less the case of the twenty-first century.

Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy use their – to a certain extent undoubtedly privileged – position of writers to speak for those whose voices have not been heard. As also Breeze herself put it: “I’m very much a Third World voice, I speak for the oppressed and the dispossessed.”<sup>277</sup> This very much differentiates them from Bhabha, who turned for inspiration primarily to literary works of such privileged light-skinned metropolitan intellectuals as Salman Rushdie or V. S. Naipaul and thereby constructed the third space without attention to what exists beyond the privileged conduits of metropolitan intellectual hybridity.

---

<sup>277</sup> “Dub Poet Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze Awarded MBE,” *Huffpost Culture*, 8 February 2013 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/02/08/jean-breeze-binta-mbe\\_n\\_2646051.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/02/08/jean-breeze-binta-mbe_n_2646051.html)>.

The need to challenge and oppose the reductive oppositions and categories has long been clear. As Edward Said noted, “we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow.”<sup>278</sup> Literature, as indicated in the introduction to this thesis, is highly significant for the twenty-first-century world in that it represents a key environment where categories can be destroyed, dismantled, revised, where new spaces can be created and thereby function as models for reality. In this regard, Bhabha’s theoretical concepts could be regarded as indeed of high value.

Equally important, however, is its capacity to maintain connection of the text to reality by turning for inspiration to those whose voices have been silenced. As Ashcroft et al. put it, it is essential to stress the transformative work of the text, i.e. the way in which the text transforms the societies and institutions within which it functions.<sup>279</sup>

It is the connection of all these important aspects that makes works by above discussed British-Caribbean women writers so significant and worth far more critical attention than they have so far received. Their works testify to the fact that imaginative outlets such as literature might have as much to say about racial and gender discrimination and oppression as for example sociological studies or other works directly concerned with these issues.<sup>280</sup>

Moreover, as indicated in the introduction, Nichols’, Breeze’s, Smartt’s and Levy’s works are informative not only about the specific positions of British-Caribbean women writers in the UK. Throughout this thesis, women writers/critics of various geographical origins have been referenced, migrants of various diasporic journeys different from those of Nichols, Breeze, Smartt and Levy – cosmopolitan women such as Spivak, Mohanty, Lessing, or Atwood. Similar topics, too, have been analysed by other non-white women writers around the world. Bodymemory, for example, was at the centre of Bharati Mukherjee’s “A Four Hundred-Year-Old Woman” (1991). Mother-daughter bond has been extensively discussed in such works as Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). The

---

<sup>278</sup> *Orientalism* xxii.

<sup>279</sup> *The Empire Writes Back* 168.

<sup>280</sup> G. Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) vi.

history of the female body was central to Ruth Ozeki's *The Year of Meat* (1998). Meiling Jin's *Song of the Boatwoman* (1996) was also characteristic of a global focus moving across locations in London, China, California, Malaysia and the Caribbean. This list could as well continue to include women writers from former colonies, or migrant/ marginalised women writers around the world.

None of the above works can therefore be viewed in isolation. Although they are all rooted in their specific locations, they are a part of a much larger current of writing that is taking place worldwide.<sup>281</sup> As Bromley put it, they are situated “with reference to their diasporic nature and to a process of, if not precisely denationalisation, then delinking from the givens of hegemonic nationalities or cultural nationalist models of identity (...) which prioritise and privilege the dominant category unproblematically.”<sup>282</sup> By disconnecting and fracturing racial, ethnic and national distinctions, British-Caribbean women writers work to connect the world and participate on the ever so important enterprise of promoting human community.<sup>283</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> S. R. Cudjoe, ed., *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference in Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* 2.

<sup>282</sup> *Narratives for a New Belonging* 16.

<sup>283</sup> *Orientalism* 328.



## References

### Primary sources

- Breeze, J. B. *The Fifth Figure*. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2006.
- . *The Third World Girl*. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2011.
- Levy, A. *The Long Song*. London: Headline Publishing Group, 2011.
- . *Small Island*. London: Headline Publishing Group, 2004.
- Nichols, G. *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2010.
- . *Startling the Flying Fish*. London: Virago Press, 2005.
- Smartt, D. *Connecting Medium*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011.
- . *Ship Shape*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008.

### Secondary sources

- Acheraïou, A. *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Ahmad, A. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, 2008.
- Alexander, S. A. J. *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
- Ashcroft, B. et al. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Ashcroft, B. et al. eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- . *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Berger, J. *And our Faces, my Heart, Brief as Photos*. London: Writers and Readers, 1984.
- Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.

- Blunt, A. and Wills, J. *Dissident Geographies: An Introduction to Radical Ideas and Practice*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000.
- Brah, A. et al. "Thinking identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture." *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture*. Ed. A. Brah. London: Macmillan, 1999.
- Brodber, E. "Oral Sources and the Creation of a Social History of the Caribbean." *Jamaica Journal* 16.4 (1994): 2-11. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*. 6 December 2013 <<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00090030/00041> >.
- . "Sleeping's Beauty and the Prince Charming." *Stories from Blue Latitudes: Caribbean Women Writers at Home and Abroad*. Eds. E. Nunez and J. Sparrow. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006: 27-31.
- Bromley, R. *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- Burrows, V. *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Cannon, K. "The Emergence of a Black Feminist Consciousness." *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. Ed. L. M. Russell. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985: 30-40.
- Carr, H. "Woman/ Indian, the 'American' and his Others." *Europe and Its Others*, vol. 2. Eds. F. Barker et al. Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1985: 46-60.
- Cixous, H. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Eds. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. New York: Schocken Books, 1980.
- Cudjoe, S. R. ed. *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*. Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1990.
- Dabydeen et al. eds. *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Donnell, A. *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments In Anglophone Literary History*. New York: Routledge, 2006
- Du Bois. *The Negro*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

- Fanon, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto, 1986.
- Friedman, J. "Global crises, the struggle for cultural identity and intellectual porkbarrelling: cosmopolitans versus locals, ethnics and nationals in an era of de-homogenisation." *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. Eds. P. Werbner and T. Modood. London: Zed Books, 1997.
- Gadsby, M. *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- Garber, M. and Vickers N.J., eds. *The Medusa Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Gilman, S. L. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes and Sexuality, Race and Madness*. London: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Goodman, L. "Who's Looking at Who(m)? Re-Viewing Medusa." *Modern Drama*. 39.1 (1996): 190-210.
- Gray White, D. "The Life Cycle of the Female Slave." *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Nineteenth Century*. Eds. M. Forman-Brunell and L. Paris. University of Illinois, 2011: 15-30.
- Hall, S. "The Spectacle of the Other." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Ed. S. Hall. London: SAGE Publications in association with the Open University, 1997.
- Harding, S. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Hill Collins, P. "Defining Black Feminist Thought." *Race Critical Theories*. Eds. P. Essed and D. T. Goldberg. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008: 152-175
- Huggan, G. *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Hull, G.T., et al., eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1982.

- Hyam, R. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.
- Kaneh, K. "Feminism and the Colonial Body." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. London: Routledge, 2003: 346-348.
- Kincaid, J. *Lucy*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.
- King, A. "Postcolonial African and Caribbean literature." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Eds. Irele and Gikandi, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.
- Ledent, B. *Caryl Phillips*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Loomba, A. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Lorde, A. "An Open Letter to Mary Daly." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- McClintock, A. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- McKittrick, K. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Mohanty, Ch. T. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. London: Routledge, 2003: 259-263.
- Morgan, P. D. and Hawkins, S. "Blacks and the British Empire: An Introduction." *Black Experience and the Empire*. Eds. Morgan and Hawkins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 .
- Morrison, T. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Ed. W. Zinsser. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987: 101-124.
- Narain, D. C. *Contemporary Caribbean Women`s Poetry: Making Style*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Nasta. S., ed. *Motherlands: Black Women`s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. London: The Women`s Press, 1991.

- . "Setting Up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels." *Other Britain, Other British*. Ed. A. R. Lee. East Haven, Conn: Pluto Press, 1995.
- Nichols, G. *I Is a Long Memored Woman*. London: Karnak House, 1983.
- Ozeki, R. *My Year of Meat*. London: Picador, 1998.
- Parente-Čapková, V. "Vzdorné psaní, strategický esencialismus a politika lokace: Feministická (literární) teorie a postkoloniální studia." *Konstruování gender v asijských literaturách*. Ed. Blanka Knotková-Čapková. Praha: Česká orientalistická společnost, 2005.
- Parry, B. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. London: Routledge, 2003: 36-44.
- Patke, R. S. *Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Phillips, C. *Cambridge*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.
- . *The Final Passage*. London: Picador, 1995.
- . *A New World Order*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002.
- Plath, S. "Medusa" *The Collected Poems*. Ed. T. Hughes. New York: Harper and Row, 1981: 82-84.
- Robbins, B. "Comparative Cosmopolitanism." *Social Text*. 31.32 (1992): 169-186.
- Rushdie, S. "Imaginary Homelands." *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Penguin Books, 1992: 9-21.
- Said, E. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Sairsingh, Marie. "Transcending conventional identity structures: Dorothea Smartt's re-negotiated self-projections." *Journal of English and literature*. 3.7 (2012): 154-157. *Academic Journals*. 15 July 2013 <[http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379518328\\_Sairsingh.pdf](http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379518328_Sairsingh.pdf)>.

- Sarton, M. "The Muse as Medusa." *Collected Poems, 1930-1973*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1974.
- Sharpe, J. *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Spivak, G. Ch. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. London: Macmillan, 1988: 66-111.
- . "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. London: Routledge, 2003: 269-272.
- Suleri, S. "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B. et al. London: Routledge, 2003: 273-280.
- van der Veer, P. "'The enigma of arrival': Hybridity and authenticity in the global space." *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. Eds. P. Werbner and T. Modood. London: Zed Books, 1997.
- Walker, G. B. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. Harper and Row, 1986.
- Wall, Ch. A. *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage and Literary Tradition*. Chape Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Wallace, E. K., ed. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Walvin, J. *The Black Presence*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1971.
- Wetherell, M. And Mohanty, Ch. T., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Identities*. London: SAGE Publications, 2010.
- White, H. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Wylie, H. *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

Young, H. B. *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body*. Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2006.

Young, R. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London Routledge, 1990.

Young, R. J. C. *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

### **Internet sources**

Crown, S. "Seamstress of the Caribbean." *The Guardian – Culture – Books*. 17 June 2006, 22 December 2013  
<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jun/17/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>>.

"Dorothea Smartt." *British Council – Literature*. 16 October 2013  
<<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/dorothea-smartt>>.

"Dorothea Smartt – Ship Shape." *Peepal Tree Press – book details*. 15 June 2013  
<[http://www.peepaltreepress.com/single\\_book\\_display.asp?isbn=9781845230586](http://www.peepaltreepress.com/single_book_display.asp?isbn=9781845230586)>.

"Dub Poet Jean 'Binta' Breeze Awarded MBE." *Huffpost Culture*. 8 February 2013  
<[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/02/08/jean-breeze-binta-mbe\\_n\\_2646051.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/02/08/jean-breeze-binta-mbe_n_2646051.html)>.

"Grace Nichols." *British Council – Literature*. 19 November 2013  
<<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/grace-nichols>>.

"Jamaica Kincaid." *Caribbean Writer: The Literary Gem of the Caribbean, University of the Virgin Islands*. 17 December 2013  
<[http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=612&catid=13:volume10&Itemid=2](http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=612&catid=13:volume10&Itemid=2)>.

Smartt, D. "About Ship Shape." *Wordpress*, 11 September 2013  
<<http://dorotheasmartt.wordpress.com/about-ship-shape/>>.